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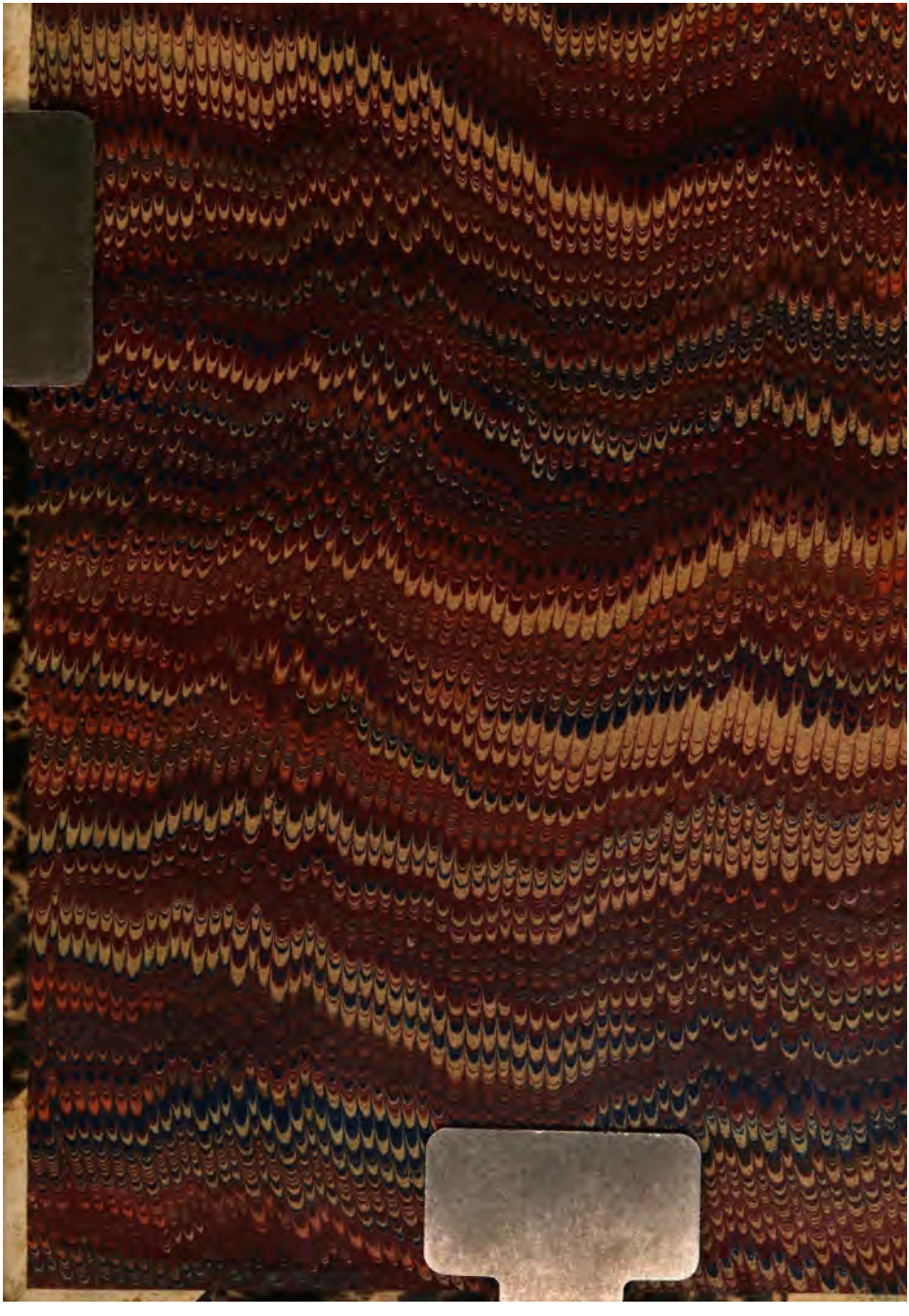

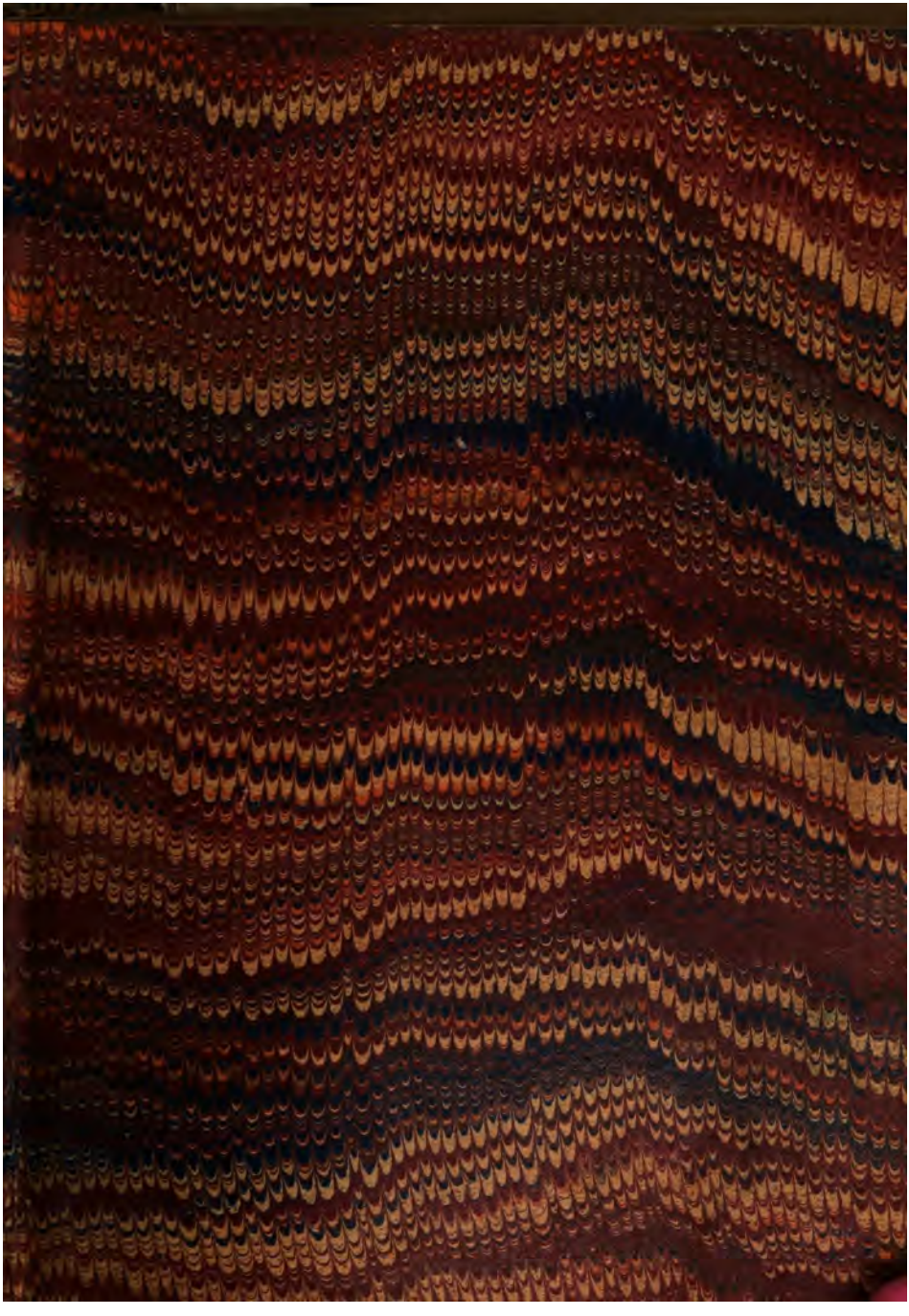

THE LIFE

OF

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD,

AUTHORESS OF "OUR VILLAGE," ETC.,

RELATED IN A SELECTION FROM HER LETTERS
TO HER FRIENDS.

EDITED

BY THE REV. A. G. L'ESTRANGE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET,
Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.
1870.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

SINCE the first edition of this work was published, my esteemed friend the Rev. William Harness has passed away. He was not destined to witness the completion and success of the literary undertaking in which, from his affection for the Authoress, he took so warm and personal an interest. An under-estimate of his own talent and influence prevented him from prefixing to it a name which would have been its brightest ornament; but he left a valuable contribution in the introduction, conclusion, and two connecting passages: vol. i. p. 59, vol. ii. p. 86.

Similar delicacy caused him to erase from Miss Mitford's letters all commendatory allusions to himself; but one of these I happily preserved, and have thought it my duty now to reproduce (vol. iii. p. 236) as a testimony of regard from one with whom through life he was intimately associated.

A. G. L'ESTRANGE.

LONDON,
NOVEMBER 30, 1869.

TO THE READER.

As one of the earliest of Miss Mitford's friends, I was prompted to give the story of her life, not only by my admiration of her genius, but from feeling that such an example of self-sacrifice to filial duty as her life affords, ought not to be left without a record. I thought this might best be done by a connected series of her letters; which, while it related in her own words the events as they occurred, and what were her feelings under them, might show her opinions on the books she read, and the people among whom she lived; the varying moods of her mind, and the permanent qualities of her character. On entering on this task, I was very little aware of the difficulties that attended it. These did not arise from any lack of material. There was a large quantity of family letters left among Miss Mitford's papers, and several of her friends were most kindly willing to supply me with anything in their possession which might be of service to my undertaking. But, on the contrary, the difficulty lay in the quantity and the condition of the MSS. As the mass of papers lay

before me, I seemed to have entered on the disentanglement of some gigantic puzzle, of which the clue was nowhere to be found. And, after writing the first chapter, and the account of her earlier years, I should certainly have given up the work but for the encouragement and invaluable assistance of my friend Mr. L'Estrange. The handwriting, which was seldom clear for three lines together, was often so small as to be scarcely legible by the unassisted eye. Any names that were mentioned without some previous knowledge of the subject they related to could be only vaguely guessed at. Many of the more interesting letters were written on unfolded envelopes, fly-leaves of books, on any odd scraps of paper that came readiest to hand, of which several were sent off under one cover, as parts of the same friendly communication. All these, often separated the one from the other, were to be hunted for and arranged. With exception of the earliest, almost all the letters were undated, and where the post-mark was wanting or indistinct, their place in the correspondence had to be discovered by the contents. But these troublesome impediments—and how troublesome and wearying such impediments are can only be conceived by one who has experienced them—were not a little increased by another difficulty. When the MSS. were arranged in something like chronological order, it was found that there was hardly a letter in which some circumstance, or anecdote, or opinion, that occurred in it was not repeated in a second or a third. This, indeed, was no

more than might have been expected in the correspondence of a person leading so quiet a life as Miss Mitford, and writing to so many friends at such distances from each other. The words were different, but the sense was the same. And the making choice between these parallel passages—the retaining the best and rejecting the others—was no pleasant or easy occupation. But at length—with the kindly help of Mr. L'Estrange—the work is finished; and we trust that, though it may have little attraction for those whom nothing less than the strong excitement of a sensational novel can satisfy; the book may not be entirely without its charm for many others, as exhibiting the reverses and labours, the thoughts and feelings, the tastes and opinions, of a very highly gifted and most excellent woman.

ONE OF MARY RUSSELL MITFORD'S EXECUTORS.

LONDON,
OCTOBER 21, 1869.

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THE

LIFE AND LETTERS

OF

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION, AND LETTERS TO THE END OF JUNE, 1806.

THE earliest family document which was found in the old hamper of dusty letters that came into the hands of Miss Mitford's executors, is the proposal of marriage from her maternal grandfather, Dr. Richard Russell,* to her grandmother, Mary Dickers. The letter, which was written on the 13th of August, 1743, has been preserved more than a hundred and twenty years, from admiration, probably, of the ingenious device in which the offer is introduced; and it is now printed as a specimen of the manner in which such negotiations were conducted in the middle of the reign of George the Second.

* Dr. Russell was a King's Scholar at Westminster, and a Student of Christ's Church, Oxford, at both of which places he distinguished himself. He was presented to the vicarage of Overton in 1719, when he was about twenty-four years of age, and, ten years afterwards, to the rectory of Ash. Both livings were in Hampshire.

"MADAM,

"Though I hate lying, I am, you know, a little given to story-telling, which shall serve as a preface to what follows, being taken out of a book, whose author was no less a man than a cardinal and prime minister of France.

"'A certain gentleman, called Themistus, happened into the company of a young lady, whose sight struck him with great admiration. Celimene (for that was the lady's name) being but of a very mean fortune, though of an extraordinary beauty, Themistus, who had immense riches, made many serious reflections upon this sudden and violent engagement. But, fearing lest his passion, which he felt so violent in its beginning, should in the end lead him to the satisfying his desires to the prejudice of his fortune, he resolved to banish from his soul so dangerous a tenderness. He opposed it therefore all he could. But, finding he could not presently overcome it, he called in a sentiment of glory to the assistance of his reason. He had the resolution to part from what he loved, and to go a volunteer into the army. But he returned thence more amorous than he went, and visited his mistress with greater joy and a stronger desire. Then, blaming himself for his weakness, he made a second effort, and undertook a second voyage, which was to Italy. He would try, it seems, whether pleasure and diversions would appease those inquietudes, which perils and fatigues could not allay. But the carnival of Venice was as little conducive to that purpose as the siege of Breda; for he appeared at his return more ardent and passionate than ever. *My dear Philemon* (said he, speaking to his friend), *I lead a wretched life; I cannot forget Celimene; I have her always in my thoughts, and I see her con-*

tinually before my eyes with all her charms. In short, (added he, and this was his saying), *I must marry her that I may cease to love her.* Accordingly he did marry her; and fifteen days of marriage changed his violent and tumultuous love into a sweet and delightful friendship.'

"I have told you, Madam, this French story, that I might have an opportunity of observing to you, that the consideration of fortune is of no weight with a real lover; that a true love is not to be diverted by any sort of engagements from its beloved object; and that the most violent and tumultuous passion will in a reasonable mind soon terminate in that greatest of earthly blessings, a most 'sweet and delightful friendship.'

"That you are not in the circumstances of Celimene —I mean as to fortune—is, I own, a pleasure to me, because I am not in those of Themistus. But my passion for you, you may assure yourself, is no less real than was that of Themistus for Celimene, though I have not the opportunity of showing it in the same light, and to the same advantage, which he had.

"If I was master of the world, I would lay it at your feet. As I am only owner of a small part of it, I offer you the whole of what I have—and am

"My dear Miss Dickers,

"Yours most unfeignedly,

"R. RUSSELL.

"Ash, August 31, 1743."

The author of this epistle was forty-eight years old and a widower, but had no children.* He was of the

* His first wife was Elizabeth, the relict of Simon Boulte, Esq., of Westminster.

Bedford family,* possessed a good private fortune, held the rectory of Ash with the vicarage of Overton, and was one of the magistrates for the county. His suit was successful; and, after a delay of a year and a half, he was married to Miss Dickers in the spring of 1745. The lady was not so entirely without fortune as the letter of Dr. Russell might lead us to imagine. Her father was a Hampshire gentleman of considerable landed property, who, beside "a certain sum of money" settled on his daughter on her marriage, left her fifteen hundred pounds in his will, appointing that it "should be placed in the hands of trustees and be subject to the same conditions as the settlement."

The offspring of this marriage was a son and two daughters, of whom the son and the elder daughter died in their youth. Mary, the younger daughter, who was born on the 4th of June, 1750, thus became sole heiress to the property of her parents.

On the loss of his son, Dr. Russell resigned the vicarage of Overton, but resided and continued to do duty at Ash, where he died, in January, 1783, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, and lies buried near the grave of his first wife.

On leaving the rectory, his widow and daughter removed to a house at Alresford; at which Mrs. Russell died, on the 8th of March, 1785, a little more than two years after her husband; and whence she was borne to be again united to him in the churchyard of Ash. Their daughter was now left alone, in the oppressive solitude of a large house and with no companion but her father's library. She was rich—her fortune was at her

* In Mrs. Mitford's letters to her daughter, she refers to her ancestor, Lord Russell; to her cousins, Lord William and Lord Charles Russell; and to her being in mourning for the Duke of Bedford.

own command—of course she had suitors. From these she was not long in making her selection; and we read in the parish register of Alresford for October 17, 1785, the marriage of George Midford and Mary Russell.

We have spoken of Mary Russell as an heiress. She was no inconsiderable heiress for those times. We are speaking of eighty years ago—the golden age of five per cent. And besides houses and property in land, Miss Russell inherited 28,000*l.* in money. In addition to these attractions, she had been carefully educated by her father; and to the ordinary accomplishments of gentlewomen in those days, had united no slight acquaintance with the authors of Greece and Rome. She was kindhearted, of mild and lady-like manners, of imperturbable temper, home-loving, and abounding in conversation, which flowed easily, in a soft and pleasant voice, from the sources of a full mind. Her figure was good, slight, active, and about the middle height; but the plainness of the face—the prominent eyes and teeth—the very bad complexion—was scarcely redeemed by the kind and cheerful expression which animated her countenance.

The George Mitford whom Miss Russell married, was the younger son of a younger brother of Mitford* of Bertram Castle in Northumberland. He had been a pupil of John Hunter, and after graduating at Edinburgh had settled himself at Alresford, to try his chance of obtaining practice as a physician. He had excellent

* The name Mitford, or Midford, as it is sometimes written, is derived from the situation of the keep of the castle, which stands between the fords of the Wansbeck. The father of Miss Mitford, in all his early life, spelt his name in accordance with its derivation. As George Midford he was married, and as M. R. Midford his daughter was sent to school. The change of the spelling seems gradually to have taken place in 1802, during the building of Bertram House.

natural abilities; and though they had been but little cultivated, and his reading was not very extensive beyond Whig newspapers and party pamphlets, he possessed a certain kind of tact, by which he seldom failed to discern and appreciate merit in any work of literature or art. He had high animal spirits, and a joyous constitutional good humour, so long as he was pleased; but it was accompanied by a corresponding amount of irascibility if his wishes were thwarted. He was not devoid of generous emotions; and, partly from good will, and partly from an irrepressible desire of action, was ready to volunteer his services for any neighbourly kind office. But he was at the same time utterly selfish at heart, and incapable of sacrificing the slightest inclination of his own for the welfare of his wife, or even of his daughter. His manners were easy, natural, cordial, and apparently extremely frank; but he, nevertheless, met the world on its own terms, and was prepared to allow himself any amount of insincerity which seemed expedient to the occasion. And, though a very brief career of dissipation had reduced his pecuniary resources to the lowest possible ebb, he was not only recklessly extravagant, but addicted to high play.

Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand why the young physician should have endeavoured to make himself agreeable to Miss Russell: but it is difficult to divine what could have induced Miss Russell to cast a favourable regard on his addresses—unless we suppose her to have been won by his extraordinary personal beauty. That, in early manhood, must have been very great indeed; for although, in middle life, his figure lost the lithe grace of the Apollo and expanded into the larger proportions of the Bacchus,

he retained—even an octogenarian—its unmistakeable remains. In this description we of course only speak of Dr. Mitford as he appeared to his acquaintances. He must have possessed some bright, sterling, domestic virtues, which were indiscernible to their eyes. He must have been endowed with some latent good qualities, which kept him constantly dear to his wife and child. For, notwithstanding that gradual diminution, first of their luxuries, and afterwards of their comforts, to which his extravagances reduced them, they were never heard to complain of his conduct, nor appeared to love him less, nor seemed to consider any privations or exertions too great, which, for his sake, they were required to undergo.

There were full ten years' difference between the ages of Dr. and Mrs. Mitford—he was about twenty-five, she was in her thirty-sixth year. They settled at Alresford, in the house to which Mrs. Russell removed on leaving the rectory of Ash, and in which her daughter after her death had continued to reside. And here their only child, Mary Russell Mitford, was born two years after, on the 16th of December, 1787, and was christened on the 22nd of February, 1788.

The child, at a very early age, evinced great precocity of intellect. At three years old she was able to read; and "her father," she says,* "proud of her one accomplishment, would often perch her on the breakfast-table to exhibit it to his admiring guests, who admired her all the more because she was a puny child, appearing younger than she was, and gifted with an affluence of curls, which made her look as if she were twin sister to her own great doll." The passages by which her proficiency was tested on these occasions,

* 'Recollections of a Literary Life,' vol. i. p. 3.

were from the Whig newspapers of the day; and as these must naturally have been wearisome to her, after she had gratified the company by her reading, her mother "would gratify her by reciting 'The Children of the Wood.'"

From 'The Children of the Wood,' she proceeded to an acquaintance with the other contents of 'Percy's Reliques.' The stories of these old ballads, by which her taste for poetry was so early awakened and fostered, took such a strong possession of her infant mind, that, before she could read them herself, her father, who could deny her nothing, was coaxed into placing the volumes in the hands of her nurse, that they might be read to her whenever she wished.* "The breakfast-room," writes Miss Mitford, "where I first possessed myself of my beloved ballads, was a lofty and spacious apartment, literally lined with books, which, with its Turkey carpet, its glowing fire, its sofas and its easy chairs, seemed, what indeed it was, a very nest of English comfort. The windows opened on a large old-fashioned garden, full of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, honeysuckles, and pinks."

Charming as this home of her infancy was, and brightly as the recollections of it lived in the mind of Mary Mitford, its existence was of brief duration. Mrs. Mitford, in the generosity of her nature, and the entire confidence of her affection, would not allow any part of her property to be settled on herself. Her husband, with the exception of about 3500*l.* in the funds, which sum was placed beyond his reach in the hands of trustees,† had the absolute command of her fortune;

* 'Recollections of a Literary Life,' vol. i. pp. 4, 5.

† This settlement was on Mrs. Mitford, her children and grandchildren, and was in force till February, 1838; when, Mrs. Mitford

and so loose and careless was his management of it, that within eight or nine years of their marriage he had to sell his furniture and library, and remove from Alresford, with his wife's fortune irretrievably involved.

His first movement was to Lyme Regis; but here he did not remain more than a twelvemonth. His next removal was to London; and there, we have heard from those who knew him well, that about the year 1795 or 1796, the doctor was living with his wife and child on the Surrey side of Blackfriars Bridge, and finding a refuge from his creditors within the rules of the King's Bench.

From this depressed state of their affairs the family were delivered by a prize in the lottery. The circumstances under which the ticket in this lottery was purchased were curious. The doctor took his little girl with him to the lottery office to choose the number, and a quantity of tickets were laid down on the counter for her to select from. She at once fixed upon the number 2,224. There were difficulties in the way of the doctor's possessing himself of that ticket. It was one that had been divided into shares, all of which had not been taken by the same office; and he wished to procure a whole ticket. The child could not be induced by any persuasion to relinquish her first choice. What was to be done? The little girl was, as all who knew her at that early age will agree, "a spoilt

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being dead, and the only child having attained the age of fifty, the trustee allowed the stock to be transferred. The money it produced very rapidly disappeared. Miss Mitford supposes that this settlement was made from her father's own resources. But this is a mistake. These 3500*l.* stock consisted of moneys settled on her grandmother by Mr. Dickers, her father. Dr. Mitford had squandered all the little he had before he saw Miss Russell.

child;" and her father—superstitious, as every gambler appears more or less to be—allowed her to have her way. The sixteenth she had fixed her heart upon, she carried home with her; the remaining shares of the number were bonght up from the other offices, at a considerable advance in price; and the doctor, on the drawing of the lottery, received 20,000*l.*, the largest prize that was then given, as the fruit of—we cannot say, his wisdom and discretion.

In the joyous expansion of his heart upon this success, Dr. Mitford told his friends that he should settle the sum he had thus won upon his daughter. But if any such settlement was ever made, it could not have been of a very binding description; for the money had, in the course of a very few years, passed into his hands, and, according to his careless manner of holding it, had fallen out of them again.

Thus re-established in his finances, we find the doctor, about the year 1797, residing at Reading, with his phaeton, his spaniels and his greyhounds, and enjoying his good fortune with all his wonted hilarity of spirit, prodigality of expense, and utter want of consideration for the future. The house was a new red-brick house on the London road. It had a garden behind it, down the middle of which was a long straight gravel walk, bordered on either side with flowers. That walk Mrs. Mitford would pace up and down for hours together, in contented, or at least uncomplaining, solitude. But with all her devotion to her husband, the meditations of that excellent woman could not have been otherwise than sad, as she looked back on the secure affluence of her childhood, youth, and early womanhood, in her father's parsonage, and compared it with the changes and embarrassments of her married

life, and with the precarious nature of her actual prosperity, which hung in fearful hazards on the fleetness of the doctor's greyhounds, or the number of his trumps at whist.

Her daughter was at this time at school in Hans Place—a small square into which you turn on the right hand out of Sloane Street, as you go from Knightsbridge to Chelsea. It was then—some seventy years ago—just finished; and the houses, bright, fresh, newly painted, looking into a garden full of shrubs and flowers, were in no slight request among persons of moderate incomes and gentle condition. One of the largest of them, No. 22, had been taken by M. St. Quintin,* a well-born, well-educated, and well-looking French emigrant, for the purpose of setting up a ladies' school, which, perhaps, of all the schemes adopted by any of his suffering and ingenious co-mates in exile for the relief of their necessities, appeared the most extraordinary and least likely to answer. He made the attempt, however, and it succeeded. He was assisted, or rather chaperoned, in his undertaking by his wife, a good-natured, red-faced Frenchwoman, much muffled up

* This gentleman had been secretary to the Comte de Moustiers, one of the last, if not the last, of the ambassadors of Louis Seize to the court of St. James's. In her 'Literary Recollections,' Miss Mitford gives the following interesting description of his private life. "He knew many emigrants of the highest rank, and indeed of all ranks; and being a lively, kindhearted man, with a liberal hand and social temper, it was his delight to assemble as many as he could of his poor countrymen around his hospitable supper-table. These suppers took place on Saturdays, and were followed by tric-trac and reversé. Something wonderful and admirable it was to see how the dukes and duchesses, marshals and marquises, chevaliers and bishops, bore up under their unparalleled reverses! How they laughed and talked, and squabbled and flirted, constant to their high heels, their rouge, and their furbelows —to their old liaisons, their polished sarcasms, and their cherished rivalries."

in shawls and laces; and by Miss Rowden, an accomplished young lady, the daughter and sister of clergymen, who had been for some years governess in the family of Lord Bessborough.* M. St. Quintin himself taught the pupils French, history, geography, and as much science as he was master of, or as he thought it requisite for a young lady to know; Miss Rowden, with the assistance of finishing masters for Italian, music, dancing, and drawing, superintended the general course of study; while Madame St. Quintin sat dozing, either in the drawing-room with a piece of work, or in the library with a book in her hand, to receive the friends of the young ladies, or any other visitors who might chance to call.

The school was in every respect an excellent school. The situation was good, for in those days Hans Place was nearly surrounded by fields; and the house had a garden quite sufficient for the children to play about in, between the hours of tuition, or in doubtful weather, and for their longer walks Hyde Park was close at hand. They were healthy, happy, well-fed, and kindly treated. Those who chose to learn had full opportunity of learning; and the intelligent manner in which the instruction was given, had the effect of producing in the majority of the pupils a love of reading and a taste for literature.† There were three vacations in the year;

* Miss Mitford says that Miss Rowden was preceded by a tall, stately French lady, in high-heeled yellow slippers. Her dominion must have been of very short duration. The remembrance of it has passed away from the minds of all the oldest surviving pupils of the school.

† Miss Rowden entertained a high opinion of the ladies educated under her auspices: on which, Miss Mitford observes (August 8, 1811), "Fanny Rowden surely does not mean to assert that all who have breathed the air of 22 Hans Place must be female Solomons. If she do, Heaven help her! Don Quixote, when he took the fair nymphs of the

the breaking up for which was always preceded by a festival; and the preparation for these great occasions kept the little inhabitants of 22 Hans Place continually interested and amused from one holiday to another. At Midsummer there was a distribution of prizes, not only to those among the pupils who were distinguished for proficiency in their studies, but to those who were approved for their general good conduct. Before they went home at Easter or Christmas, there was either a ballet, when the sides of the school-room were fitted up with bowers, in which the little girls who had to dance were seated, and whence they issued at a signal from the dancing master's kit, attired as sylphs or shepherdesses, to skip or glide through the mazy movements arranged for them; or there was a dramatic performance, as when the same room was converted into a theatre for the representation of Hannah More's 'Search after Happiness,' and an elocution master attended the rehearsals and instructed the actors in their parts.

To this school Mary Russell Mitford was sent, after the Midsummer holidays of 1798, when in her eleventh year. Like so very many precocious children, she was of a scrofulous temperament, and had suffered much from illness in her infancy. In person she was short for her age; and, there is no possibility of evading the word by any gentle synonym or extenuating periphrasis, she was, in sincere truth and very plain English, decidedly fat. Her face, of which the expression was kind, gentle, and intelligent, ought to have been handsome, for the features were all separately good and like her

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inn for the daughters of the governor of the castle, did not make a greater mistake."

father's, but from some almost imperceptible disproportion, and the total change of colouring, the beauty had evanesced. But although very plain in figure and in face, she was never common-looking. She showed in her countenance and in her mild self-possession, that she was no ordinary child; and with her sweet smile, her gentle temper, her animated conversation, her keen enjoyment of life, and her incomparable voice—"that excellent thing in woman,"—there were few of the prettiest children of her age who won so much love and admiration from their friends, whether young or old, as little Mary Mitford. And except, indeed, that her hair became white at an early age, few persons, it may be added, in passing through so many vicissitudes of life, ever altered so little, either in character or appearance.

Once fairly entered at M. St. Quintin's school, Mary Russell Mitford seems to have applied herself, with all her heart and mind, to learn whatever the masters and mistresses were prepared to teach her. French, Italian, history, geography, astronomy, music, singing, drawing, dancing, were not enough to satisfy her eager thirst for instruction: and we find her emulous of her governess, Miss Rowden, who was diligently reading Virgil, and informing her mother that she intended to learn Latin. "I have just," she says, "taken a lesson in Latin; but I shall, in consequence, omit some of my other business. It is so extremely like Italian, that I think I shall find it much easier than I expected."* But against the acquisition of this new accomplishment there came a demurrer from home. "Your mother and myself," writes her father, "have had much conversation concerning the utility of your learning Latin, and we both agree that it is perfectly unnecessary, and would

* Letter to her mother, August 6, 1802.

occasion you additional trouble. It would occupy more of your time than you could conveniently appropriate to it; and we are more than satisfied with your application and proficiency in everything."* But the daughter carried her point, and the Latin lessons were continued, while at the same time she danced in the ballets and acted in the plays.† Of her eager exertions in striving for the prizes of the school, we have an account in a letter of her mother's.

Mrs. Mitford had taken lodgings in town for a few days, and in writing to her husband she says, "Mezza" (one of the pet names by which they called their daughter), "who has got her little desk here, and her great dictionary, is hard at her studies beside me. On account of the warmth of the weather, she has omitted her dancing lesson this morning. Her little spirits are all abroad to obtain the prize, sometimes hoping, sometimes desponding. It is as well, perhaps, you are not here at present, as you would be in as great a fidget on the occasion as she herself is."‡ There are two other passages in Mrs. Mitford's letters from London to her husband at this time, from which we may infer the success of their daughter's diligence. "You would have laughed yesterday," she writes, "when M. St. Quintin was reading Mary's English composition, of which the subject was, 'The advantage of a well-cultivated mind;' a word struck him as needless to be inserted, and which, after objecting to it, he was going to expunge. Mam Bonette (another pet name), in her pretty meek way

* August 9, 1802.

† When Hannah More's 'Search after Happiness' was performed, she took the part of Cleora.

‡ June 3, 1802. It is to be presumed the honour was won, as the prizes both for French and English composition of the year were awarded to Miss Mitford.

urged the necessity of it. Miss Rowden was then applied to. She and I both asserted that the sentence would be incomplete without it, and that there must be a further alteration in the sentence if the poor disputed participle was dismissed. St. Quintin, on a more deliberate view of the subject, with all the liberality which is so amiable a point in his character, begged our daughter's pardon, and the passage remained as it originally stood."* The next extract shows the attention that the child gave to subjects which would have appeared but little likely to interest one of her imaginative character, and evinces the proficiency she attained in them. "Our treasure" — Mrs. Mitford is writing to her husband—" was much amused yesterday morning. In her astronomical lecture, she not only completely posed Miss Rowden, but M. St. Quintin himself could not reconcile a contradiction which she had discovered in the author they were perusing. You cannot have an idea of the gratification the dear little rogue feels in puzzling her instructors."† Excepting music, there was no branch of education within her reach at the Hans Place School which she was not zealous and successful in the pursuit of; but in that accomplishment she took little pleasure. She never at any time of her life showed much taste or feeling for it. We find that the harp, which was sent for in August, 1802, was relinquished, with the perfect acquiescence of her parents, in the following October.

During the five years that she passed at school, a constant correspondence was kept up between Reading and Hans Place; and its tone is entirely different from that by which letters between parent and child are generally distinguished. Each writes to the other, on all

* May 27, 1802. † June 12, 1802.

subjects, with perfect openness and confidence, and as if they were on terms of complete equality. The daughter freely gives her opinions of the persons she meets and the books she reads; relates the little events that are happening to herself or her companions, with the full assurance that whatever interests her will interest her correspondents; and she asks for anything she wants with a perfect conviction that it will immediately be sent her. The parents' letters are replete with the gossip of Reading, with tales of the Doctor's whist club and coursing arrangements, or of Mrs. Mitford's visitings abroad and parties at home.

We insert a few extracts from some of these letters, which may serve to show what Mary Russell Mitford was as a school-girl, and the sort of intellectual food on which her character was nourished by her communications from home.

From MARY RUSSELL MITFORD, *in her eleventh year, to her Father.*

"Hans Place, Sept. 15, 1799.

"MY DEAR PAPA,

"I sit down in order to return you thanks for the parcels I received. My uncle called on me twice while he stayed in London, but he went away in five minutes both times. He said that he only went to fetch my aunt, and would certainly take me out when he returned. I hope that I may be wrong in my opinion of my aunt; but I again repeat, I think she has the most hypocritical drawl that I ever heard. Pray, my dearest papa, come soon to see me. I am quite miserable without you, and have a thousand things to say to you. I suppose that you will pass almost all your time at Odiam this season, as it is a very good country for

sporting; and that family is so agreeble, that it would be very pleasant for mamma to stay there with you.

"Remember me to all the family, particularly to grandpapa* and William."

On the leaf of an old pocket-book is written, "Nov. 30, 1800—Where shall I be this day month? At home! How happy I shall be! I may do what I like then, and shall be ready to jump out of my skin for joy."

"Feb. 23, 1801.

"I really think that my dearly-beloved mother had better have the jackasses than the cart-horses. The former will at least have the recommendation of singularity, which the other has not; as I am convinced that more than half the smart carriages in the neighbourhood of Reading are drawn by the horses which work in the team."

"Feb. 23, 1802. Hans Place.

"A thousand thanks to my dear, dear darlings for the cake, puddings, letters, sweets, &c.! I have only one thing to complain of, which is that none of the letters mention my dear Dodo" (another pet name for the Doctor) "coming to town; but he must recollect his promise, and that Monday next is the 1st of March.

"I am extremely glad to hear that all my live stock are well. You must call my cow Ellen, as I think that a very pretty name.

* A pet name by which she called Dr. Harness, who was one of the trustees for the few thousand pounds settled on her mother, the capital of which her husband could not touch, and who had acted as father and given Miss Russell away on her marriage to Dr. Mitford.

"March 23, 1802.

"I hope dear old Tod" (her father) "will take care of his sweet head! His poor Mam Bonette is not able to fly, or she certainly would come to Reading to nurse him, and she is the only one that nurses him well. But dear Mumper" (her mother) "must not be jealous, as she knows his Mam was always his head nurse"—"I hope you will be obliged to take down your house at the farm. It will be much better to have it all new together."

"Dec. 16, 1802.

"I have just received your letters, and thank you again and again for them. I cannot find terms to express my gratitude and my affection to my darling parents, and therefore must pass them over in silence. I shall most certainly be at liberty by two o'clock; but I hope you know me well enough to be assured that it is the pleasure of embracing my sweet mother which makes me anxious to come, and not of going to the ball, to which I certainly shall not go. I have been invited to go to the Harness's to-day, but refused, and promised that, if you were disengaged, we would go to dinner there on Friday. So you see I am already getting a great lady, making, accepting, or refusing engagements according to my fancy."

The letters from which the above extracts are taken are so entirely on domestic subjects, that they would be wearisome if printed entire; and the passages we have given are enough to show, not only the terms of perfect confidence with which Mary Mitford was accustomed from her childhood to pour forth her thoughts and feelings to her parents, but the extraordinary correctness and facility of expressing them which she had

attained, before her thirteenth year was yet completed. The letters of Mrs. Mitford (we have but one of the Doctor's—that already alluded to, about his daughter's learning Latin) more resemble those of one sister to another than of a mother to a daughter. The following few extracts will be sufficient to give a general idea of them:—

"Sept., 1798.

"Your dear papa and I dined with Mr. Annesley yesterday. After dinner papa attended Mrs. Bouchier to the play that she might see young Banister act the part of Sheva in 'The Jew.' I remained to play cribbage with the Mrs. Davidsons, the two Mr. Annesleys, and their sister. This evening we are all going to the play again to see 'A Cure for the Heartache' and 'The Children in the Wood.' To-morrow we dine at Mr. Ross Lewin's. Banister performs three nights."

"Dec. 7, 1802.

"We are at present over head and ears in parties. We are going this evening to a large supper party at Dr. Douglas's, twenty at least. To-morrow Mrs. Bradley and Mrs. Terry play quadrille here quietly with your darling Tod and me. Wednesday, you know, is the Card Club. Thursday we are invited to three different places—the Miss Hargood's, Mrs. Sturge's, and Mrs. West's. Friday I have a card party at home, and this day week a supper party for Mr. Pococke and family, with whom we spent a very pleasant evening last Friday."

Such was the general tenour of Mrs. Mitford's letters. They represent the Reading of that time as a place abounding in kind and genial hospitality, not

altogether free from little scandals and disagreements; but as generally enjoying a pretty even flow of cordial, neighbourly, and amusing intercourse. But the parties, of which these letters speak, have been long forgotten; the entertainers and the guests must for years have passed away, and there may not perhaps survive a human being who would at the present time feel any interest in having them recalled to his recollection. The account of all the gossip and gaiety of this country town, Mrs. Mitford duly reported, in frequent, if not daily despatches to her daughter, who had all her life an eager curiosity to be acquainted with everything that was going on around her; and by whom, after she became engaged in literary pursuits, the incidents that she had been told, and never seemed to forget, were interwoven with her descriptions of 'Belford Regis' or 'Our Village.' It is remarkable that in these letters of her mother, detailing, with so much particularity, the doings and engagements of herself and her acquaintances, no word of advice, either moral or religious, is ever mingled. Was this wisdom? Carelessness or indifference it could not have been. If we may be allowed to infer the motive from the result—knowing what a devoted daughter Mary Mitford became—we may be well induced to believe that her mother's silence on these more serious arguments originated in deep reflection; and that she had judiciously determined simply to attach and amuse her child by her correspondence, and trusted to the impressive persuasion of her example for the inculcation of higher things.

In the extracts from Miss Mitford's letters which we have given above, she alludes to "the farm," and "the farm horses." This farm, which was a recent purchase of Dr. Mitford's, consisted of a house and about seventy

or eighty acres of land. It was situated in a very pretty pastoral country, at Grasely, about three miles from Reading. The house, which had been built as a country gentleman's residence, in the time of Elizabeth or James the First, had lost station in the neighbourhood—had fallen out of repair, and was only tenanted by agricultural labourers. It stood near the road, in a garden, of which, during years of neglect, the walks and borders had become no longer distinguishable; the flowers had perished, and the weeds were flourishing in undisturbed luxuriance. The house faced the south and looked across the road to a piece of common land, over which some cottages, a few oaks, and many brakes of entangled thorns, wild roses, and honeysuckles were picturesquely scattered. The estate was supposed to have a defective title; and the Doctor, having bought it for a few hundred pounds, had determined on restoring the house, and making it his home. And wise would he have been, had he never attempted more! The old building should never have been materially altered. The interior arrangements may have been, perhaps, less convenient than modern refinement has inclined us to require; much space was lost in passages; the sitting-rooms were too far apart; the bed-chambers opened one into the other. But these defects a little ingenuity would have overcome. And there was a romantic character about the old place, for the loss of which no amount of modern accommodation could compensate. That old sitting-room, with its large sunny oriel window, and its walls wainscotted in small carved panels, was worth a dozen of the formal, commonplace rooms of the new house. Then there was a large oaken staircase, with a massive balustrade and broad low steps, such as are safe and easy to childhood and old age.

Then there were expansive fireplaces, with highly architectural chimneypieces adorned with old-fashioned busts and coats of arms. Above all, there were two secret rooms, in which priests and cavaliers had been known to hide, and which could be well secured by inward fastenings; the one in a garret, where a triangular compartment of the wall pushed in and gave entrance to a chamber in the roof; the other, which was discovered only on taking down the house, where the entire ceiling of a large light closet could be raised, and access obtained to a place of concealment capable of containing six or seven fugitives. That house should never have been destroyed, and to this opinion the Mitfords themselves arrived at last, after the work of demolition had advanced too far to be stopped, and they found that pulling down the old walls was well-nigh as expensive as building up the new. But the Doctor always loved the excitement of change; his wife was easily persuaded to think as he did; and his daughter, at thirteen years of age, "was glad they were obliged to take the old farmhouse down, as it would be much better to have it all uniform."* So Grasely Court was levelled, and Bertram House (so named to intimate that its owner was a scion of the Mitfords of Bertram Castle†) was erected in its stead. The following account of laying the first brick is from Mrs. Mitford to her daughter:—

"Reading, April 30, 1802.

"Your letters, my beloved girl, have given us the greatest satisfaction that we could experience in your absence. Yesterday we passed the day at our farm in

* Letter, March 23, 1802.

† The original name of the family is said to have been Bertram.

order to lay the first brick. I insisted on Toney* being present at the ceremony, and as her dear little mistress was not there, she was to be, as far as she could, your substitute by putting her little paw on the brick which you should have laid had you been present. I trust you will think this was no bad idea. All the bells in Reading were ringing when we left home on this important business; but, not to arrogate too much to ourselves, and to confess the truth, I believe it was Mr. J. Bulley's generosity which called forth their cheeriest sounds. However, from whatever cause arising, we had the full benefit of the peal.

"We got to our rural retreat about half-past nine, both the men-servants attending us on horseback. At ten o'clock your old Mumpsa" (a pet name for herself) "laid the first brick, and placed under it a medal struck in commemoration of the centenary of the Revolution in 1688. Your darling father then placed another for himself, and a third for his beloved treasure, which he made Toney put her foot upon; and after the little rogue had done so, you would have laughed to have seen how she wagged her tail, and nodded her head upon it, as much as to say she was very proud of being admitted to have, not a finger, but a foot, in the business. The men worked merrily on till two o'clock, and then repaired to the public-house, where two legs of mutton, and bread, beer, and potatoes were provided for them. There they enjoyed themselves for the rest of the day, and this morning cheerily resumed their labours."

The house thus formally and festively begun was, when completed, an ordinary edifice enough. It was put back further from the road than the old house, that

* Miss Mitford's pet greyhound.

there might be gates with a drive up to the door; and the hedge in front, with its thorns, honeysuckles, eglantines, and blackberries, was superseded by a dull piece of park paling, with a plantation within it, which effectually shut out the view of the common.

About this time—the year 1802—the letters of Miss Mitford begin to indicate her perception of the worth of the books which were put into her hands. She had hitherto been diligent at her lessons, and ambitious of the rewards of diligence; but though she must before this time, in the daily routine of the school, have become familiar with hundreds of the finest passages of our best authors, we do not meet with a single word of admiration, from which it might be inferred that she had looked upon them in any other light than as lessons to be learnt by heart. She did not seem to have been any more impressed by them than she might have been by so many pages of Mangnall or Lindley Murray. We now find a strong development of her literary taste.

In her subsequent correspondence there is an expression of enjoyment of what she reads. "I told you," she says in a letter to her father, dated August 20, 1802, "that I had finished the Iliad, which I admired beyond anything I ever read. I have begun the Æneid, which I cannot say I admire so much. Dryden is so fond of triplets and Alexandrines, that it is much heavier reading; and, though he is reckoned a more harmonious versifier than Pope, some of his lines are so careless that I shall not be sorry when I have finished it. I shall then read the Odyssey. I have already gone through three books, and shall finish it in a fortnight. Drawing, music, and Italian are going on extremely well, particularly the latter. I am now read-

ing that beautiful opera of Metastasio, 'Themistocles;' and, when I have finished that, I shall read Tasso's 'Jerusalem Delivered.' How you would dote on Metastasio, my sweet Tod! His poetry is really heavenly. French letters and English composition go on likewise extremely well. I have written one English composition on 'Balloons,' and another 'On Amiable Manners.' I have not shown the latter. The former M. St. Quintin said was extremely well done."

From a Letter to MRS. MITFORD.

August 24, 1802.

I am glad my sweet mamma agrees with me with regard to Dryden, as I never liked him as well as Pope. Miss Rowden had never read any translation of Virgil but his, and consequently could not judge of their respective merits. If we can get Wharton's Æneid, we shall finish it with that. After I have read the Odyssey, I believe I shall read Ovid's Metamorphoses. I shall be very glad of this, as I think they are extremely beautiful. . . . I am much obliged to you for saying that I need not learn dancing, as it is really my aversion. . . . Send me by papa a volume of Metastasio unbound, which I left at home. I am much flattered, my darlings, by the praises you bestowed on my last letter, though I have not the vanity to think I deserve them. It has ever been my ambition to write like my darlings, though I fear I shall never attain their style.

Hans Place, August 30, 1802.

All things go on well. M. St. Quintin was perfectly delighted with my French letter on Saturday. Miss Essex says that I shall play and sing very well, and that I improve amazingly. Signor Parachiretti

is sure that I shall know Italian as well as I do French by Christmas. I know you will not think that it is *through vanity* that I say this, who should not say it; but I well know you like to hear that your darling is doing well, and I consult more your gratification than false modesty in relating it to you. I went to the library the other day with Miss Rowden, and brought back the first volume of Goldsmith's 'Animated Nature.' It is quite a lady's natural history, and extremely entertaining. The style is easy and simple, and totally free from technical terms, which are generally the greatest objection to books of that kind. The only fault is its length. There are eight volumes of it. But as I read it to myself, and read pretty quick, I shall soon get through it. I am likewise reading the Odyssey, which I even prefer to the Iliad. I think it beautiful beyond comparison. I wrote yesterday a short letter to C——. I had received so many from her without answering any of them, that I was quite ashamed of my laziness. In fact, I dislike writing to every one but to my own Tods; and I would rather write to them than do anything.

The close of the year 1802 completed Miss Mitford's career at school. She had been there more than four years, and had perhaps learnt as much on the subjects in which she was interested, as her instructors were able to teach her. She had just reached the age of fifteen; and we may infer, from a letter to her mother, that her introduction to the gaieties of the neighbourhood was fixed for the Race Ball of the ensuing August. At these balls it was the custom of the steward of the races to dance with the young ladies who then came out; and Miss Mitford, referring to

the distress which one of her young friends must have suffered on having had to dance with a stranger on such an occasion, adds, "I think myself very fortunate that Mr. Shaw Lefevre will be steward next year, for by that time I shall hope to know him well enough to render the undertaking of dancing with him much less disagreeable."

Being thus settled at home with her parents, the correspondence, which had been, during her absence at school, so actively kept up between them, came to a natural conclusion, and with the exception of one joint letter from Mrs. and Miss Mitford to the Doctor in town, dated June 15th, 1804, we have no others till the beginning of 1806. But from that single letter we learn a great deal. It informs us that Bertram House was finished; that the family were established in it; that they were daily complimented on all that they had done and intended doing, by a host of visitors; and that Dr. Mitford, having completed his residence according to his own plans and to his own satisfaction, had already begun the practice of absenting himself from home, and inventing excuses for frequent and long-continued visits to London.

Any person, forming his notion of Mary Russell Mitford's habits of life from her writings, might conceive that she was instinct with no small portion of the Diana Vernon spirit; that she was engaged more than young ladies generally are in the field sports of the country; and that where her father was she would be, whether he was out with his gun and his spaniels, or on the coursing field with his greyhounds. But this was not the case. Her inclinations had no such bent. Her love for her father gave her an interest in the results of his favourite pursuits. Her love of animals attached her to

the dogs, from which when at home he was inseparable, and of which she delighted to hear any instance of the mettle or sagacity. Of his pointers there was generally one which, after it was too old for sport abroad, became her favourite companion at home. Of his greyhounds there was always one which she had nursed up and petted from its puppyhood, as her own, and in the triumphs or defeats of which she entered with all the joy or sorrow of her earnest nature. But her delight in the sports of the field was no more than a sympathetic reflection of her father's pleasure. It was theoretical and not practical. She was no horsewoman.* She was capable of very little exercise beyond a moderate walk. And while Dr. Mitford was, during the coursing season, going about here and there with his greyhounds, it may be doubted whether the daughter ever saw a coursing match in her life, except on a hillside from a carriage window. No; she remained at home and received visits. She went out in the green chariot with her mother and returned them. They drove into Reading after their visits were all paid, to do their shopping and hear if there were any news, or rather to pick up the present gossip of the neighbourhood; and when these affairs were despatched, and they found themselves again at home, the daughter would lie for hours together on a sofa, with her dog by her side, reading anything—good, bad, or indifferent, which came to hand, guided by chance or fancy, without any apparent attempt at selection.

* In a letter to Sir W. Elford, dated Sept. 13, 1817, she expresses her strong dislike to equestrian exercise; and the only notices we have of her ever having made the attempt, inform us of her having been flung off a donkey, and having had her riding-habit converted into a gown for the winter.

The number of books she read is almost incredible. We have a catalogue of them in Mrs. Mitford's handwriting, from the 1st of January, 1806, to the end of 1811. It appears to have been kept as a check on the bill at the circulating library, and we publish the list for the first month of the former year as a literary curiosity:—

LIST OF BOOKS READ JANUARY, 1806.

	Vols.
St. Margaret's Cave	4
St. Clair of the Isles	4
Scourge of Conscience	4
Emma Corbett	2
Poetical Miscellany	1
Vincenza	2
A Sailor's Friendship and a Soldier's Love	2
The Castles of Athlin and Dumbayn	1
Polycratia	2
Travels in Africa	1
Novice of St. Dominick	4
Clarentina	3
Leonora (Miss Edgeworth's)	2
Count de Valmont	3
Letters of a Hindoo Rajah	2
Fourth Volume of Canterbury Tales	1
The Citizen's Daughter	1
Amazement	3
Midnight Weddings	3
Robert and Adela	3
The Three Spaniards	3
De Clifford	4

This list gives us an amount of fifty-five volumes read in thirty-one days. And, supposing that this indefatigable attention of her mind to works of imagination was intermitted on the Sundays, to attend her somewhat distant parish church, and to look into the few books of a higher character which her mother had been able to save from the sale of her grandfather's library,

she could not have read less than two volumes a day throughout the rest of the month. Undoubtedly the young lady must have consumed a great deal of trash; but there are some constitutions with which nothing seems to disagree; and probably there was none of these works from which she did not derive some advantage. If she met with nothing good to imitate, she at least learned to see what was bad and to be avoided.

Dr. Mitford spent the first months of the year 1806 in London, and a few of the letters which he received from Bertram House remain. They are of little interest. They speak of hardly anything except the dogs and the poultry. The most important things which we incidentally learn from them are, that Miss Mitford, in her enthusiastic admiration of Charles Fox, "had taken possession of his bust, which her father had sent from town, with the intention of hanging it, instead of her watch, at the head of her bed;" * and that she was for some time occupied "in arranging and copying out for the press" a collection of verses by her grandfather, Dr. Russell, which she considered "much superior to most modern collections."† This volume seems to have been prepared for publication. There was a discussion among them about the person to whom it should be dedicated. It was forwarded, with a preface by Mrs. Mitford, to the Doctor in town, with directions that "he should take the precious MS. to Mr. Philips, or any other publisher he liked better, and get as much money as he could for it."† But here the story of the volume ends. The partial eyes of the granddaughter and the daughter saw, perhaps, more merit in Dr. Russell's verses than was perceptible to

* Letter of Mrs. Mitford, March 12, 1806.

† Letter of Miss Mitford, March 28, 1806.

the mercenary view of any London bookseller. The book was never published; but subsequently several specimens of the Doctor's composition appeared in the 'Poetical Register,' which were after the formal manner of Shenstone, but lacked the graces of the model.

In May, Miss Mitford went to London on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. St. Quintin, and from their house the following letters were written. The first is to her father, who was staying at Richardson's Hotel, in Covent Garden:—

Hans Place, Friday evening.

I am infinitely obliged to my dear best-beloved darling for his very, very kind attention to me in securing a ticket.* I shall like very much to go with our party here, as it will be a most interesting day. Mr. St. Quintin is to meet us at the corner of Spring Gardens at half-past eight, that we may secure good places. I shall only regret that we must be separated, but I should be greatly mortified to stay at home on so delightful an occasion. I am quite well to-day, but I long almost as much to see you as to be at the trial. We shall be punctual at Spring Gardens, and I cannot express how much I feel your goodness in procuring me an admission. Good night, my dear, dear papa. I am ever, with the fondest and most ardent affection,

Your own,

M. R. M.

To Mrs. Mitford, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, May 12, 1806.

I was indeed most gratified by my dearest darling's long and entertaining letter on Saturday. I have much o tell you, but it can scarcely be compressed within the

* For Westminster Hall, where Lord Melville's trial was going on.

bounds of a letter. On Thursday, after I wrote, Miss Ayrton, Miss Carp, papa, and I went to the Exhibition of Water Colours. There are some uncommonly fine pictures, and it is even better worth seeing than last year. In the evening, Victoire,* Miss A. and myself went with papa to the play to see 'The Provoked Husband' and 'The Forty Thieves.' Miss Duncan in Lady Townley is most admirable. I do not much admire Elliston as her husband. 'The Forty Thieves' is a very magnificent spectacle, but nothing more; for the language and music are equally vulgar and commonplace.

On Friday morning, I, Miss Carp, and Miss Rowden went to Oxford Street. I was extravagant enough to give half a guinea for a dress skirt for myself, which I wore the next day to the trial. We were rather disappointed in Mr. Romilly. The speech in itself was beautiful beyond description; but he wants animation, and drops his voice at the end of every sentence. However, I will tell you more of this when we meet. We had very good places, and papa got into the manager's box. Miss Rowden, papa, and I are going to see 'Henry the Eighth' to-night, and we are going to Westminster Hall again to-morrow. Lady Macclesfield and Lady M. Parker called here one morning, and were most uncommonly kind to me. If I can, I shall call. I shall hope to return Thursday or Friday; for, though I am greatly amused here, I am never quite happy without my dear, dear mother. But you can have no idea of the kindness and attention of this whole family.

* M. St. Quintin's sister, and a favourite schoolfellow of Miss Mitford's.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, May 14, 1806.

I am almost disappointed, my dearest darling, at not receiving any answer to my last letter. In fact, I long so impatiently to have news from my own dear home and my darling mamma, that I can scarcely wait for papa's intelligence. We did not go to the play on Monday, but are going to see 'Henry the Eighth' to-night. I never was so much delighted as the first day at Westminster Hall. Mr. Romilly is charming and interesting; but my first and greatest favourite is Mr. Whitbread. I was yesterday rather disappointed. Mr. Plumer is rather an inelegant speaker, though very animated. I have promised papa to write some verses to Mr. Whitbread. He has even superseded Mr. Fox in my good graces.

I did not tell you, I believe, that I had the happiness of seeing Mr. Fox mount his horse on Saturday. I shall never again contend for his beauty. He was obliged to lean on two people, and looked so sallow and pale in the face, and so unwieldy in person, that I am obliged to yield our long-disputed point. To make me amends, my new favourite is what even you would call exquisitely handsome; a most elegant figure, and a voice, which I could listen to with transport, even if he spoke in an unknown language. Mr. Plumer yesterday attacked him with the most virulent irony and ridicule; and Mr. W. stood with his face turned towards him and leant upon the desk, smiling the whole time, with the most fascinating good-humour. You know I am always an enthusiast; but at present it is impossible to describe the admiration I feel for this exalted character. I shall, I hope, be at home on Monday.

I have now been three times at the trial, but I wish to hear Mr. Whitbread's answer, which will be either Saturday or Monday. I have found my black gown very convenient there and at the play. I have been altogether most fortunate; for the days on which I have been were the very best, and our places have been excellent.

Miss Mitford's admiration for Mr. Whitbread found expression in the following verses, which are alluded to in the succeeding letter to her father:

IMPROMPTU ON HEARING MR. WHITBREAD DECLARE IN WESTMINSTER HALL, ON FRIDAY, MAY 16, 1806, THAT HE "FONDLY TRUSTED HIS NAME WOULD DESCEND WITH HONOUR TO POSTERITY."

The hope of Fame thy noble bosom fires,
Nor vain the hope thy ardent mind inspires;
In British breasts, whilst Purity remains,
Whilst Liberty her blest abode retains,
Still shall the muse of History proclaim
To future ages thy immortal name.
And while fair Scotia weeps her favoured son,
By place corrupted and by power undone,
England with pride her upright patriot sees,
And Glory's brightest wreath to him decrees.

To DR. MITFORD, *Richardson's Hotel.*

Bertram House, May 24, 1806.

I claim great merit, my dear darling, in sending you the enclosed lines, for I am not satisfied with them; but I would sooner mortify my own vanity by sending you bad verses, than break my promise by withholding them. I have called them impromptu to excuse their incorrectness; and, though some may suspect them to be an impromptu *fait à loisir*, you must not betray the secret. From a perfect consciousness of my own enthusiasm, I have been so much afraid of saying

too much, that I have fallen into the opposite fault and said too little. However, I had rather be thought anything than a flatterer, though it be in my opinion impossible to flatter Mr. Whitbread; for what language can equal his merits? Yet I wished to avoid even the appearance of it. Do not impute the faults and deficiencies in these lines to my laziness; for I assure you they cost me an infinite deal of trouble; but they are not good enough to show, and I had rather you would return them to me immediately. At all events, let me know how you like them, and what you have done with them. I should very much like to know what will be Lord Melville's sentence. Who was the member who gave the dissentient voice to the vote of thanks to the managers; Mr. Perceval, I suppose? but it is not directly mentioned in our stupid 'Star.' We have been reading Mrs. Opie's 'Simple Tales,' and are greatly pleased with them.

To DR. MITFORD, *Richardson's Hotel.*

Bertram House, June 3, 1806.

I will not deny, my dearest beloved darling, that I am a little disappointed at your not having seen Mr. Whitbread, after you had taken so much pains to obtain an interview. His eulogium is far higher than I either merited or expected. Every one seems agreed respecting the extreme folly of Sheridan's entertainment.* You gentlemen always contrive to turn these things off upon the ladies; but it is no proof of a man's wisdom to let a vain woman† govern him.

* To which all the invited went, and afterwards declaimed against its extravagance.

† This vain woman was Dr. Mitford's near relation.

CHAPTER II.

LETTERS FROM SEPTEMBER 21, 1806, TO 1807.

AFTER her return from town in June, we have no letters of Miss Mitford's till the 21st of September, when she went with her father to visit his friends in the north of England. Justly proud of his clever and accomplished daughter, the Doctor was doubtless influenced in taking this journey to Northumberland by the natural vanity of introducing her to his relations, and of letting her see the position in his native county which those relations held. The incidents of the tour, which took place more than sixty years ago, are recounted in the following letters from Miss Mitford to her mother:—

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Royston, Sunday night, Sept 21, 1806.

We had a very long interval between the parting from my most beloved darling and the leaving Reading. The coach was completely full; and it was fortunate papa had secured a place on the box, where he continued during the whole journey. The company in the inside had the merit of being tolerably quiet; and I do not remember any conversation which lasted longer than a minute. I, certainly, ought not to complain of their silence, as I was more than equally taciturn, and scarcely

spoke during the whole way. I was quite low-spirited, but never less fatigued by travelling. Both Mr. Joy and Dr. Valpy met us before we left Reading, and M. St. Quintin and Victoire met us at the Bath Hotel. They are very well, and Victoire will certainly wait on you. She was delighted with the idea of going, and will write to let you know the day. Her brother will accompany her, and, I believe, sleep one night at our house. I promised to tell you she would come, in order to obviate the necessity of her writing, till she can fix the day of her arrival.

As soon as Victoire left me, I retired to bed, under the idea of pursuing our journey early in the morning. It was, however, half-past ten before Mr. Ogle* got up, and we did not leave town till twelve. We employed the interval in going to the bookseller's for a Cobbett, and bought a Cary's Itinerary, an edition of Peter Pindar, and a few plays. The edition of P. P., which we bought cheap, remains in town; but the others are our travelling companions. We went by Enfield to see Mary Ogle, and finding them at dinner we dined at Mrs. Cameron's; we then changed horses at Waltham Cross; again at Wade's Mill; and are just arrived here, where we sleep to-night. Mr. Ogle is extremely pleasant, and the carriage very convenient. We went the two first stages on the box of the barouche. I need not tell you, my dearest darling, that we felt nothing so much as the loss of your society; and I have wished myself at home fifty times in the last twenty-four hours, to be again with my dear mamma.

* Nathaniel Ogle was a great friend and distant relation of Dr. Mitford, and had an estate in Northumberland. The journey was made in his carriage, and a great part of the Doctor's visit to the north was spent in his house.

[Dr. Mitford had a first cousin who was married to Lord Charles Murray, fifth son of the third Duke of Athole. She had become by the death of her mother's brother a wealthy heiress, and assumed the name of Aynsley, which was also adopted by her husband.]

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Little Harle Tower, Sept. 28, 1806.
Sunday evening.

I arrived here with Lady Charles, about two hours since, my dearest mamma; and I find from papa that in his letter to you to-night he never mentioned that the irregularity of the post, which *never* goes oftener than three times a week from hence, will prevent our writing again till Wednesday, when we go to Sir William Lorraine's, and hope to get a frank from Colonel Beaumont, whom we are to meet there. It is only by Lord Charles going unexpectedly to Morpeth that I am able to write this, merely to beg you not to be alarmed at not hearing oftener. I imagine papa has told you all our plans, which are extremely pleasant. Lord and Lady Charles stay longer in the country on purpose to receive us, and have put off their visit to Alnwick Castle that they may take me there, as well as to Lord Grey's, Colonel Beaumont's, and half a dozen other places. I stay here till Saturday.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Little Harle Tower, Oct. 3, 1806.
Friday morning.

I received yesterday, my dearest darling, your very long letter, and am charmed to find you amuse yourself so well during our absence. We took a long walk on Wednesday morning, and got very wet; and the scenery, though extremely beautiful, by no means compensated

me for all the mud I was forced to wade through. Lady Charles minds it no more than a duck; but I have begged to be excused from such excursions for the future. As I was changing my wet clothes, Colonel and Mrs. Beaumont called on their way to Kirk Harle to apologise for not spending the next day here, as they are obliged unexpectedly to go into Yorkshire immediately. Of course then I did not see them; but we met at dinner at Sir William Lorraine's; and Mrs. B. was so polite as to express great regret that, as she was going from home, she could not see us at her house, but hoped, when next we came to Northumberland, we should come to see them at Hexham Abbey. She is a very sweet woman. We had a very pleasant party—not at all formal—Sir W. and Lady Lorraine, Mr. and Mrs. Lorraine (his eldest son and his wife, who live with Sir W.), Mr. John Lorraine, the Beaumonts, and ourselves. Mrs. B. told Lady Charles that they received last year a hundred thousand pounds from their lead mines in Yorkshire; and they never make less than eighty thousand, independently of immense incomes from their other estates. Mrs. B. was dressed in a lavender-coloured satin, with Mechlin lace, long sleeves, and a most beautiful Mechlin veil. The necklace she wore was purchased by her eldest son, a boy of eleven, who sent it from the jeweller's without asking the price. It is of most beautiful amethysts; the three middle stones are an inch and a half long and an inch wide; the price was nine hundred guineas. Mrs. B. wished to return it; but the Colonel not only confirmed the purchase, but gave his son some thousands to complete the set of amethysts by a bandeau and tiara, a cestus for the waist, armlets, bracelets, brooches, sleeve-clasps, and shoe-knots. All these she wore, and I must

confess, for a small dinner-party appeared rather too gaily decorated, particularly as Lady Lorraine's dress was quite in the contrary extreme. I never saw so strong a contrast. Her ladyship is a small, delicate woman, and Mrs. B. large and strong; and she wore a plain cambric gown and a small chip hat, without any sort of ornament either on her head or neck. Colonel Beaumont is generally supposed to be extremely weak; and I had heard so much of him, that I expected to see at least as silly a man as Matthew Robinson; but I sat next him at dinner, and he conducted himself with infinite propriety and great attention and politeness; yet, when away from Mrs. Beaumont, he is (they say) quite foolish, and owes everything to her influence with him. They live in immense style at the Abbey; thirty or forty persons frequently dine there; no servants but their own admitted; and there is constantly a footman behind every chair. I hope I have not tired you with this long account; but they are the principal people in the neighbourhood, and I know my own darling is always pleased to know among whom her Twart* is thrown.

Yesterday morning was extremely fine, and Lady Charles ordered her landaulet at twelve, and took papa and me to call at Wallington, the very beautiful seat of Sir John Trevelyan, who has given it up to his eldest son. Mr. T. was at home, and Lady C., in order to show me the house, went in and saw him. It is indeed extremely magnificent, and has been fitted up this summer in all the splendour of Egyptian decoration. There are three very large drawing-rooms, a fine dining-room, study, &c. We then drove to Capheaton (Sir John Swinburne's). The family were out, but we admired the park, and drove home by the lake,

* Another of her own pet names.

which covers forty or fifty acres, and is beautifully diversified with islands bordered by fine woods. The ride altogether was through as picturesque a country as I ever saw; and I was greatly disappointed that to-day being wet prevented our going to Belsay Castle, the seat of Sir Charles Monck. The Squire of the Castle,* arrived here yesterday. He and Lord C. are shooting, and papa and his dear godson—the finest boy you ever saw—are coursing. I told you I was not enamoured of Mr. M., and I will now describe him to you. In person he something resembles Mr. P——; but he is an oddity from affectation; and, I often think, no young man affects singularity when he can distinguish himself by anything better. He affects to despise women, yet treats them with great respect; and he makes the most extraordinary assertions to provoke an argument, from which he generally escapes by some whimsical phrase.

To-morrow I go to Morpeth; on Monday Miss Mitford† and I go to Kirkley, and on Wednesday we both come here, to go to Alnwick on Thursday. On Saturday we return to Morpeth for a few days, but soon come back here, to go to Lord Grey's and Admiral Roddam's. Lady Charles would not part with me at all if she were not afraid of offending her father and mother; and, as it is, I shall be a week at Little Harle for a day at Morpeth. You perceive, my dear, sweet darling, that the plan of going to Alnwick is changed; we now go next Thursday, in order to avoid sleeping there, which we must have done if we had gone there at the same time as to Lord Grey's; and it will, I think, be much pleasanter. When I return we are to have a fishing party on Sir John Swinburne's lake.

* Mitford of Mitford Castle.

† Her first cousin and Lady Charles Aynsley's younger sister.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Kirkley,* October 8, 1806.
Wednesday morning.

My very long letter of Friday, my dearest Mumpa, and papa's three billets would give you a full account of our movements, till we arrived here on Monday at about three o'clock. We were received with great glee by the Squire; and, after taking a short walk in the garden, returned to dress. We had some time to wait for Lord and Lady Charles, who did not arrive before half-past five or near six, and even then undressed. They had been detained by the axle-tree breaking down, and the detestable roads. Without their waiting to dress, we immediately sat down to dinner, and spent a most delightful day. In the evening we found a manuscript play which had been sent last year for Mr. Sheridan's perusal. It is taken from a very striking story in the 'Canterbury Tales,' of which I have forgotten the title, but you may perhaps recollect it from the scene being laid in Bohemia, and the principal characters bearing the names of Josephine, Kreutzner, and Conrad.† It is in blank verse, interspersed with songs. I read it aloud to the ladies, and the gentlemen played billiards, and occasionally visited us. The play, which bears the name of 'Sigendorf,' is really extremely interesting, and much better, as to language, than most modern productions. Sheridan had never looked at it, and Mr. Ogle lent it to Lady Charles.

Yesterday morning, after a long walk, Lord and Lady C. and Charlotte left us. John remains, and we are to take him home to-day. We had an excellent dinner,

* Mr. Ogle's seat in Northumberland.

† It seems to have been taken from the same story as Byron's 'Werner.'

and amused ourselves in the evening with the 'Liber Veritatis,' which is, as you may remember, a very expensive collection of two hundred of Claude Lorraine's sketches, published by Boydell.

We are going in about an hour to Little Harle, with John as our escort; for Mr. Ogle and papa remain here together. We mean to call at Belsay Castle (Sir Charles Monck's) in our way, and shall get to Little Harle in time for dinner. We go to-morrow to Alnwick and return the same night. I will write you a long account of our stately visit on Saturday, when I return to Morpeth. To-morrow is expected to be a very full day at the Castle, on account of the Sessions Ball. The ladies—the married ones, I mean—go in court dresses, without hoops, and display their diamonds and finery upon the occasion.

Mr. Ogle is quite a man of gallantry and makes his house extremely pleasant. We talk of coming to see him again next week, when my cousin Mary and I are left to keep house alone at Morpeth, and my uncle and aunt go to Little Harle Tower.

Most fondly yours,
M. R. M.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Morpeth, Oct. 11, 1806.
Sunday evening.

In papa's letter of yesterday, my dearest darling mamma, he promised that I would write you a long one to-day, and I certainly owe you one in return for the very entertaining epistle I received yesterday. After we left Kirkley on Wednesday, we called at Belsay, and saw Lady Monck and the little Atticus, who was born at Athens fifteen months since. He is a fine boy, very

like Sir Charles. Belsay is a very old castle, and its eccentric possessor has done all he possibly could desire to render it still more *outré* by stopping up the proper road, and obliging us to approach this fine specimen of Gothic architecture through the farm-yard. We arrived at Little Harle to dinner; and you would have been greatly amused at my having my hair cut by Lord Charles's *friseur*, who is by occupation a joiner, and actually attended with an apron covered with glue, and a rule in his hand instead of scissors. He, however, performed his office so much to my satisfaction, that I appointed him to dress my hair the next morning for my visit to Alnwick. While I was thus employed, Lady Swinburne called on purpose to see me. Lady Charles said I was out walking. She is, you know, niece to the Duke of Northumberland, and I regretted not seeing her.

Thursday morning we rose early and prepared for our splendid visit. I wore my ball gown, and Lady C. lent me a beautiful necklace of Scotch pebbles, very elegantly set, which had been presented to her by the Duchess of Athole, with brooches and ornaments to match. I kept my front hair in papers till I reached Alnwick, and my dress was never the least discomposed during the whole day, though we travelled thirty miles of dreadful road to the castle. Lord Charles's horses had been sent on to Framlington (eighteen miles) the day before; and we took four post horses from Cambo to that place. We set out at eleven and reached Framlington by two, and began to fear we should be rather late, as the dinner-hour at the castle is four. We passed Netherwitten, a fine place belonging to Mr. Trevelyan, whom I mentioned meeting at Little Harle; and Sworland, the magnificent seat of the famous Alexander Davison.

I had likewise a good view of the beautiful Roadly Craggs, by which the road passes, and likewise over some of the moors.

I would not attempt a description of Alnwick Castle, my dear mamma, for you may meet with it in almost any northern tour; but I must tell you that it is by no means so very princely a residence as I had imagined. The entrance is extremely striking. After passing through three massy gateways, you alight and enter a most magnificent hall, lined with servants, who repeat your name to those stationed on the stairs; these again re-echo the sound from one to the other, till you find yourself in a most sumptuous drawing-room of great size, and, as I should imagine, forty feet in height. This is at least rather formidable; but the sweetness of the Duchess soon did away every impression but that of admiration. We arrived first, and Lady Charles introduced me with particular distinction to the whole family; and during the whole day I was never, for one instant, unaccompanied by one of the charming Lady Percys, and principally by Lady Emily, the youngest and most beautiful.

We sat down sixty-five to dinner, and I was within three of the Duchess. The dinner, of course, was served entirely on plate, and the middle of the table was decorated with a sumptuous *plateau*. I was seated next a young man of large fortune, a Mr. Selby, who was particularly polite and attentive to me; and I met Sir Charles Monck, my cousin of Mitford, and several people I had known at Little Harle. After dinner, when the Duchess found Lady Charles absolutely refused to stay all night, she resolved at least that I should see the castle, and sent Lady Emily to show me the library, chapel, state bed-rooms, &c.; and she

likewise—thinking I was fond of dancing—persuaded Lady C. to go for an hour with herself and family to the Sessions Ball, which was held that night. This dear, charming Duchess is generally thought very proud; and Lord Charles says he never knew her so attentive to any young person before. She is still a most lovely woman and dresses with particular elegance. She wore a red shawl gown, ornamented round the bosom with vandykes of point lace, and a head-dress of the same, with a helmet of diamonds which Lady C. valued at about eleven thousand pounds. She had likewise splendid diamond bracelets, necklace, armlets, brooches, &c. The young ladies were elegantly dressed in white and gold. The news of Lord Percy's election arrived after dinner, and Lady Julia read me his account of it. He writes a most elegant letter, however ineffectively he may speak.

At nine we went to the ball; and the room was so bad and the heat so excessive, that I determined, considering the long journey we had to take, not to dance, and refused my cousin Mitford of Mitford, Mr. Selby, Mr. Alder, and half a dozen more whose names I have forgotten. At half-past ten we took leave of the Duchess and her amiable daughters, and about thirty other people, to whom I had been introduced at the ball, and commenced our journey homeward, after a most delightful visit. We went on very quietly for some time, when we suddenly discovered that we had come about six miles out of our way; and, as the four horses were waiting at Framlington, Lord Charles and the footman were obliged to walk before the carriage with candles to find out a cross-country road. This so much delayed us, that it was near seven o'clock in the morning before we reached home. Seventy miles, a

splendid dinner, and a ball all in one day! Was not this a spirited expedition, my darling? But I am now quite recovered from the fatigue, and Lord and Lady C. never felt it. Yesterday, Mary and I came to Morpeth, and my uncle and aunt returned to Little Harle till to-morrow week, when I go there, and we set out for Admiral Roddam's upon the Cheviot Hills, Lord Tankerville's, and Lord Grey's. Papa is to be very gay this week with Nat. He left us to-day in excellent health and spirits.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Morpeth, Oct. 20, 1806.
Monday morning.

We were out both Thursday and Friday; on the latter day at a brother of Dick Wilson's, a very agreeable man, one of the greatest folks in the town. The parties here are almost as stupid as those at Reading. The good people set all their wits to work to entertain a southern belle, and would consider it the very height of ill manners to leave me a moment at peace; and between morning calls and evening visits I am harassed to death, and extremely happy to go to Little Harle to-morrow for a day's rest, though on Wednesday we set out on a very dissipated tour to Roddam, and Fallerton, and Lord Tankerville's. I am so happy in this opportunity of seeing the Cheviot Hills and Lord Grey's amiable family. The time for our return home is not yet fixed, and I shall not be able to write again to my mamma for some days, as no post goes from Little Harle either Tuesday or Wednesday.

Cobbett's letter was most admirably written. In a postscript he mentioned that Dr. Parr had been with him on his way to attend Fox's funeral; "whose death,"

said he, "I sorely lament. He was almost the only true man among them. He was beset by a crew that cared nothing for his fame, and little for his life, but so far as it was conducive to their own selfish views. But they killed him, and in him the goose with the golden eggs."

I am just interrupted by Mrs. Brown. The morning calls here are made so early, that one morning three different people called before we were up, and four more before we had done breakfast. If papa should happen to hear of this, it would be an everlasting story against us, and we keep it a profound secret.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Little Harle Tower, Oct. 21, 1806.
Tuesday noon.

Having an opportunity of sending a letter to Morpeth to be put in the post, I cannot resist thanking my dearest mamma for her most delightful letter, which, on account of the postman not having arrived till near twelve o'clock, I received from Lord Charles last night, when I was more than half undressed. The dear treasure was quite unexpected; and you cannot imagine the delight it gave me to hear so pleasant an account of yourself and your amusements. I wonder you don't mention the ensuing general election. The Doctor's plays* engross the attention of the Reading people at present; but I suppose when the bustle has subsided, Reading will be quite in another bustle with the contending candidates. I only hope Mr. Shaw Lefevre will be well enough to canvass for himself,

* The performances by the boys in Dr. Valpy's school, in which the master took great interest, and the scholars evinced more than ordinary ability.

without requiring papa's presence, which would be rather inconvenient at present.

To-morrow morning at seven o'clock we set off for Roddam, which we shall scarcely reach before four; for though we travel with four horses, and it is only five-and-thirty miles, yet the road over the Cheviot Hills leading us above the clouds, we expect a very dreary, tedious journey. On Friday we go to Fallerton, which is seventeen miles from Roddam, and thirty-eight from here; and we sleep here Saturday night, but go out again on another expedition by six the next morning, in order to get to Simonburn in time for church, as Dr. Scott, the rector, with whom we pass that day, is a very celebrated preacher. Monday we go to Bywell, near Hexham, and take a view of that place; and Tuesday night we return home to have one day's rest before the next day, when there is a ball. Papa accompanies us on our last expedition.

[The tour, mentioned in this and the former letter, took place as it had been planned; but the pleasure of it was destroyed to Miss Mitford by the eccentric movements of her father. He had gone on a visit to his connection, Mr. Ogle, of Kirkley; but receiving some intimation that his assistance was required at the election of Shaw Lefevre, he started off for Reading at a moment's notice; and, with his wonted consideration for his own amusement and carelessness of the feelings or comfort of everybody else, broke abruptly off all the engagements which he had made with his hospitable friends in Northumberland, and left his daughter to take care of herself, and find her way back to Berkshire by whatever means she could provide. A note which found Miss Mitford at Lord Grey's

informed her of this sudden change in her father's movements, and was the occasion of the following letters:—]

To Dr. Mitford, *Reading.*

Morpeth, Oct. 22, 1866.
Saturday morning.

It is with great reluctance, my dearest darling, that I am compelled to say that I never have experienced so disagreeable a surprise as in receiving your letter yesterday at Lord Grey's. What could possibly influence you to prefer Mr. Lefevre's paltry vanity of being at the head of the poll (for of his election he was certain) to Nat Ogle's friendship and your daughter's comfort? Lady Charles leaves Little Harle on the 4th. On the 1st she is obliged to bring me to Morpeth; and *she* says that she shall be miserable in the idea of leaving me there, for your uncle, you well know, is in a state which must be dreadful to any one, and to a visitor most particularly so. You must have seen, before you left Morpeth, that your uncle's faculties were very much decayed; and Mary says that his fits of passion are such as to give you the idea of being in a hospital for lunatics.

Is this a time for me to stay, or for my aunt to receive me with any comfort? If you need any other motive to return, I must tell you that Mr. Ogle is extremely offended at your leaving him in this manner; and nothing but your *immediately* coming back can ever excuse you to him.

I now implore you to return, and I call upon mamma's sense of propriety to send you here directly. Little did I suspect that my father, my dear, beloved father, would desert me in this manner, at this distance from home. Every one is surprised. They had thought that your

parental affection was the strongest sentiment of your heart, and little suspected that it would yield so entirely to your *friendship* for any one. I expect no answer but a personal one, for it is utterly impossible that you should have any motive to detain you so strong as those I have given you for your return.

I have had a charming excursion, but I am a great deal too much discomposed to give you any particulars of it. This tour to Simonburn and Hexham was intended *solely* for *your* gratification. If we had had any idea of your frolic we should have given that up, and Lord Charles would have taken me to see what would afford me more happiness than anything, the beautiful abbey of Melrose. Pray return, my dear papa. You and mamma have ever my warmest affection, but *you* are rather out of favour at present; yet I am still fondly my Ittey boy's own

M. R. MITFORD.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Alnwick, Oct. 24, 1806.
Half-past eleven, Friday night.

I am this moment, my dearest mother, arrived from Falladon, where I must confess I experienced a most disagreeable surprise, in finding by papa's letter that he was set out for Bertram House. Happy as you must always be to see that dear, that most beloved of men, I am persuaded that upon this occasion you would not be pleased at his arrival. It has left me in a most awkward situation, and Mr. Ogle, whom I have just left, is extremely offended at his departure. In the name of goodness, dearest mamma, persuade my own darling to come back again directly. There can be no chance of any *effectual* opposition, and a very slight one of any

attempt at such a proceeding. In the mean time Nat Ogle is so affronted that, though he *says* he will wait till the 12th, I think it twenty to one that he sets off the day after he has received his rents. Lord and Lady Charles, who are kind beyond imagination or description, are obliged to be at Bocking by the 8th, and have so very large a family that it is impossible they can take me in to travel with them. It is surely a very odd thing for a young woman to be left in this strange manner.

I hope you will be able to prevail upon papa to return immediately, or he will lose a very excellent and very attached *old friend*, and do no material service to the *new one*, for whose sake he seems to forget all other things and persons. Pray exert your influence, dearest mamma, and send him back to me. Much as I love him, it is not from a capricious affection, but from an unfeigned sense of propriety, that I desire his return. Heaven bless you, my dearest, best mamma! I am ever, with the fondest affection, your and my dear runaway's own

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

If papa happens to open this letter, he must remember it is meant for mamma, and he must not read it.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Little Harle Tower, Sunday morning.
Oct. 26th, 1806.

We had a very wet journey to Roddam, and a very narrow escape, for the horses ran back upon a very steep hill, and nothing but the drag-staff could have saved our lives; for if the carriage had gone over our death was inevitable. At Framlington we were detained for want of horses, and did not reach Roddam till seven at night. It is, as I suppose you know, situated on

the north side of the Cheviot Hills, and it is impossible for any one not accustomed to a mountainous country to conceive anything so wildly grand as the situation—hills rising over hills, varied only by the narrow streams which descend with the greatest impetuosity from the rocks, and crowned by plantations of dark firs. The house is old and handsome, and their establishment upon a magnificent scale. Nothing can exceed their kindness and hospitality. The Admiral is eighty-seven, and a very fine old man. Mrs. Roddam is much younger.

Thursday we went to visit Lord Tankerville at Chillingham Castle. He is reputed to be one of the proudest men in England; but on Lord Charles telling him he wished to show me the wild cattle in his park, he ordered his horse and drove them himself towards the landaulet. They are most beautiful creatures, the original breed of the country, and the only ones preserved in England. How much I longed for you, my dearest darling, to partake of my pleasure in seeing this fine place, and during the wild and romantic drive from Chillingham to Roddam, which is eight miles.

The next morning we set out for Alnwick. About four miles from Roddam is Percy's Cross, which is placed to mark the spot where the famous battle of Chevy Chace took place. Lord Charles and I alighted to examine it, and got very wet in walking about to discover the stones which mark the leap Percy took when wounded. We succeeded in finding them. The distance is, I believe, fifteen yards. We dressed at Alnwick, and proceeded to Falladon to dinner, where I was received with the greatest kindness by the whole family. Lady Harriet and her young sister Lady Eliza are at home, and Edward Grey the clergyman, and they all vied in paying me every attention. Mr. and

Mrs. Hodges, Nat Ogle, and a Mr. Grey were all the company; and, indeed, the rooms are so small that a large party could hardly be accommodated. Eight servants in splendid liveries and two out of livery waited. The dinner was entirely served on plate, and was the most magnificent I ever saw. Lady Grey made Lady Charles promise to take me to her if there is an Election Ball; but she will be out of the country. I have likewise an invitation from the mayor for one on the 18th at Newcastle.

We returned to Alnwick to sleep, whence I wrote to my darling mamma, and next day we went to Morpeth to luncheon, where I wrote again to papa. I do not mention him now; for of course he will be on his return before you receive this letter. There never was so hair-brained a thing done as his running off in this manner. When dear Lady Charles leaves the country, what will become of me? The poor old man at Morpeth is turning superannuated; in short, there I cannot go without great inconvenience to them and great distress to myself. But this is not my chief reason: it is impossible to describe how much I long to see my mother, my own darling mother. Nothing can exceed the affection which I am treated with here, or the pains they take to amuse me; but if I stay three weeks longer without seeing you I shall be absolutely miserable. I must never marry, that is certain, for I never should be able to support an absence of three months from my beloved parents.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Little Harle Tower, Oct. 31, 1806.
Friday morning.

I received my dearest mamma's two letters of Sunday, last night, and was happy to hear that our

dear runaway was safely arrived at Bertram House. If he had not been jolted out of his recollection, he would have remembered that, had you written on Monday, I should have received it as soon at Little Harle, and you would then have been able to give me some account of your plans as to my returning. As it is I must wait patiently till Sunday morning, when I imagine I shall hear. By the same post came a letter from Mr. Lefevre to papa. As I knew both the Cheltenham mark and the seal, I took the liberty of opening it, and it is difficult to say whether I was most diverted or provoked by the contents. To pretend, with great quietness and a profusion of thanks, to decline papa's kind offer of coming to his assistance, at the time he must have known that his agent had sent for him, and that he would already be in Reading when his letter arrived here, is almost too absurd, and to fancy any one would be deceived by so flimsy a trick is not a little degrading to our understandings.

I now begin to think, if papa is not already on his return here, that the best thing you can do will be to send Chamberlayn for me, and we will come up in the coach to London and meet you there. Remember only that I cannot go alone with Nat Ogle. Even if Lord and Lady Charles had not so great a party (five children and four servants) it would not do for me to go with them, as they proceed to Cambridge and then across the country to Bocking; but as it is they completely fill three carriages. Do you know, my dear mamma, that in spite of my little boy having so entirely forsaken and forgotten me (for I have never received even a note from him since his departure), I could not leave the country without seeing his native place, which Lady Charles assures me has no other recommendation

than *that*, as it is perhaps the ugliest town in England. My cousin is so good as to promise to take me there to-morrow, if it is a fine day.

I hope you, my dear mamma, gave him a good scolding for coming without me, for every one else seems to have forgotten me. I think I might slip out of the world now very quietly without being regretted even by my dog or any one but my darling mamma. Luckily I have no mind to try the experiment.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Little Harle Tower, Nov. 2, 1806.
Sunday morning.

The promising appearance of yesterday morning, my dearest mamma, tempted us to set forward on our expedition to Hexham. On our arrival we drove immediately to the abbey, where Colonel Beaumont had arrived only the night before. Mrs. Beaumont remains in Yorkshire. The Colonel was delighted to see us, and pressed us much to stay dinner. This we, of course, refused, as it was rather too much to travel twenty miles after a six o'clock dinner. We, however, accepted his offer of seeing the beautiful church which joins his house; and Lady Charles took me to see the abbey itself. Upon repairing and beautifying this house, in which they only spend about a month in the year, the poor Colonel has lately expended upwards of twelve thousand pounds. It was a fine specimen of the Saxon Gothic architecture; but he has built upon the same foundation, retained all the inconveniences of the ancient style, and lost all its grandeur. It has on the outside an appearance of a manufactory, and the inside conveys the exact idea of an inn. I should have thought it absolutely impossible to construct so bad a

house with so many rooms. There is but one good one, which is the ball-room, and this is made the passage to the bedchambers. Yet this is the occasional residence of a man with an income of a hundred and ten thousand pounds; the residence where he receives the visits of all his constituents in this large and opulent county; and where he lives in the most princely magnificence. In order to render the bad taste of this abominable modern house still more conspicuous, it is contrasted with the singular beauty of the adjoining cathedral, whose gloomy magnificence and fine pointed arches delighted me extremely. The Colonel is the patron, I may almost say the proprietor, of this fine church (for he is what they call a lay bishop, and still receives the tributary pence from the communicants); yet that part of the edifice where the pews are placed is in a most shocking state. The bottom of one of the pews, situated exactly under his own, is covered with straw like a London hackney coach; and even his own pew seems quietly resigned to the moths and other depredators. Everything, in short, seemed to testify it was a place he seldom visited.

We dined at a very wretched inn, for I must confess, in spite of the prepossession I felt in favour of my dear Ittey's native town, that Hexham is a shocking gloomy place. After dinner I had the pleasure of visiting the house where my darling was born. It has been an extremely good one, and still retains a very respectable appearance; but it is now divided, and on one side of the street door, which still remains, is a collar maker's shop, and on the other a milliner's. We entered the latter and purchased three pair of Hexham gloves, one for papa, one for my dearest mamma, and one for Ammy. I thought that, both as a memorial of the town and of

the house, you would like that better than any other trifle I could procure. Our return was very tedious and disagreeable; but I was gratified on my arrival by finding a letter from papa, directed to Morpeth, in which he promises to be there as to-day. I cannot think, my darling, why you did not send him off on Wednesday, for the eating and drinking, and bawling at the election will do him more harm than twenty journeys. Gog,* he says, is very ill. God forgive me, but I do not pity him. He deserves some punishment for endeavouring to play such a trick upon papa and me. To-morrow is the Morpeth election; so papa will have his favourite passion gratified by being present at that also. Lord and Lady Charles will take me in with them to-morrow. I should quit this house with great regret did I not hope to be on my return to my beloved mamma by the latter end of the week.

After rejoining his daughter, Dr. Mitford remained in Northumberland long enough to make himself very busy at the Morpeth and Newcastle elections a labour he delighted in. He then returned south with her and his friend Mr. Ogle, at the end of November. The letters of 1806 cease after Miss Mitford's reaching her home again.

The period in which this tour to Northumberland was taken—the few years before it and after it—the first decade of the present century, must have been the most prosperous of Mary Mitford's life. Of the affluence at Alresford, which her father attained on his marriage with her mother, and so quickly squandered by his extravagance, her recollection must have been very faint

* A nickname among the Mitfords for their friend Mr. Shaw Lefevre.

indeed. And from the break-up of that establishment—the sale of the furniture and library—till the prize in the lottery resuscitated the Doctor's fortunes, her ideas of domestic comfort must have been of a most limited description—a lodging on the south side of Blackfriars Bridge, and the services of a maid-of-all-work. But with the acquisition of this twenty thousand pounds everything around her brightened. With recovered funds, her father had returned to his habits of thoughtless expenditure. Whatever was desired was immediately obtained. The domestic appointments at Bertram House were on a par with those of their wealthier neighbours. The servants were numerous. The furniture—bright, new, abundant, and of the latest pattern—was from a fashionable London upholsterer. The walls were ornamented by a fair collection of pictures, which, though many were by nameless or inferior artists, did no discredit to their companions—a charming Gainsborough, two sweet female heads by Greuze, and a portrait of the Doctor by Opie. The hospitality of the house was profuse and indiscriminating, and the family had gained social position, as the Whigs, in consideration of the father's earnest and somewhat noisy partizanship in their cause, had appointed him to be one of the magistrates of the county.

But this prosperity was of an unsubstantial kind. It was not only wasting away by extravagance, but wavering with the alternations of a gambler's luck. The first letter of the next chapter, one of the few that remain for the year 1807, contains an allusion to those habits of play by which Dr. Mitford was withdrawn from his home so frequently, and for such long consecutive periods.

CHAPTER III.

Letters for 1807-8-9.

To Dr. Mitford, *Richardson's Hotel.*

Bertram House, Feb. 11, 1807.

My dearest darling will, I know, sympathize with his poor Twart upon the great loss she has sustained. My poor dear owl is dead. The door blew open in the night, and some barbarous creature of her own species pecked a great hole in her neck so as to prevent her breathing. William found her lying without the cage early this morning; and, had he then mentioned it, she might perhaps have been saved; but with his usual sullen stupidity he put her back into her house, and concerned himself no more about her. She lingered on till nine o'clock, when James discovered her; but she was then dying, and we ordered them to put her out of her misery. I loved the poor bird next to my Swankey, and to lose her so cruelly has quite unhinged me. Her dear body is preserved, for I mean to have her stuffed. If you do not return to-morrow, write word whom you employ in that line in Reading. She had fought valiantly, poor thing! for her own beautiful plumage is uninjured, though covered with

blood; and the place where she was found is strewed with feathers. I will never have a pet again.

As lottery tickets continue at so high a price, had you not better dispose of yours, for I am not sanguine with respect to its turning out a prize, neither is mamma; but consult your better judgment. I think you have to deal with a slippery gentleman. You would do well to introduce a rule, that whoever introduces a gentleman should be responsible for him; that is, supposing that you mean to continue to play there; though my advice has always been, that you should stick to Graham's, where, if you have not an equal advantage, you have at least no trouble, and know your society. You have always gained more there, on an average, than with chance players like the Baron, or at inferior clubs, like the one you now frequent.

Our hyacinth, though single, is a very great beauty; it is delicately white, and has the fragrance of a tuberose. It is now fully expanded, and I fear, if you do not hasten to return, you will lose its fresh and blooming beauty. I need not say, my darling, how much we long again to see you, nor how greatly we have been disappointed when, every succeeding day, the journey to Reading has been fruitless. The driver of the Reading coach is quite accustomed to be waylaid by our carriage. Adieu. Ever most fondly your own

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Richardson's Hotel.*

Bertram House, Feb. 15, 1807.

I am greatly obliged to my beloved darling for his kindness and attention with regard to the fur cap. I do not perfectly comprehend from your letter whether

you have already bought it; and if not, I beg you, my dearest papa, to accept my most heartfelt thanks for your intention, but not to think of buying so expensive and so very useless an article. Mrs. Sheridan's* dress is always singular and fantastic; but, even if this masculine adornment be fashionable, the season is so far advanced that it would be impossible to wear it above a month longer, and by next winter it would be discarded for some new whim. We have just had the misfortune to lose our beautiful hyacinth, which dropped down not five minutes since and broke off. This is really unlucky, for our roots have turned out so ill this year that we have only hopes of one more flower. The dear primroses are out in full beauty, and the hedges will soon bloom with the verdure of May. I hope Mr. Ogle will not long detain you from us."

To Dr. Mitford, *Richardson's Hotel.*

Bertram House, April 10, 1807.

A thousand thanks, my beloved, for your very kind and entertaining letter. We rejoiced to find you had relinquished all thoughts of mobbing it to the House, which would have been a most fatiguing and tiresome exertion; and, since the *great* speakers are gone, it would most likely have met with an inadequate reward. What Grattan may be when speaking upon so interesting a subject as places and pensions, I know not; but when he was brought in last Parliament to display his powers upon the Catholic question (which is, I admit, to party men a subject of very inferior importance), the

* The second wife of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. She was a Miss Ogle, and a cousin of Dr. Mitford's. Lawrence painted a picture of her in a fur cap.

House was extremely disappointed. If I remember rightly, he was characterized as a 'little, awkward, fidgetty, petulant speaker;' and the really great man who then led the Opposition easily dispensed with his assistance. Pray, whom do you include in the Prince's party? but many would-be placemen will, I dare say, be sufficiently ready to court the rising sun. It used to be by no means a numerous one; mamma insists that Charles Fox used to belong to it. This I dispute *in toto;* but I shall be much obliged to you to settle our debate. It is true that the Prince inclined much more to Fox than Pitt, and his people generally voted with the former; but Mr. Fox never was in his secrets, and he would have disclaimed with indignation the crooked policy of the heir apparent.

You wish to know what I thought of the Lefevres' visit; and I assure you, my dear darling, that I think just the same of them now as I did before. They were (excepting in one instance, which is too long to detail in a letter) tolerably civil; and Mr. Lefevre sported some intolerably bad puns, which were, I suppose, intended for our entertainment; but they did not discompose my gravity. In short, I believe that he has no inclination to meet you, and was glad to find you were in town. Little minds always wish to avoid those to whom they are under obligations; and his present 'trimming' in politics must conspire to render him still more desirous not to meet you, till he has found which party is *strongest.* That will, I am of opinion, decide which he will espouse.

Now for domestic news. Our family has been increased this morning by the birth of a calf. I saw it conducted home in triumph in a wheelbarrow, and followed by its fond mamma (little Mary), and the

other cows. Heaven bless you, my beloved! We long for your return, and are ever most fondly

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.
MARY MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Richardson's Hotel.*

Bertram House, April 15, 1807.

The debate in the House of Lords is, as you observe, my beloved darling, extremely interesting. I perfectly agree with you as to the great merit of Lord Erskine's very eloquent speech. It does him the greatest credit; and, as he was against the Catholic question, his opinions will have more weight with the country than those of any other of the ex-ministers. I always thought Lord Sidmouth a very bad speaker. His sun is set, never, I hope, to rise again! Mr. S. Lefevre's speech is worthy of attention, as being to the full as incomprehensible as that of his worthy colleague upon a late occasion. In fact, I would defy the most expert solver of enigmas to resolve the question of which side he meant to support. Do you remember the definition of "modern candour" in Mr. Canning's 'New Morality'? The member for Reading seems to have laid claim to this virtue in its highest perfection. According to him:—

"Black's not so black, nor white so very white."

In short, the more I know of this gentleman the more I am convinced that, under a roughness of manner, he conceals a very extraordinary pliancy of principles and a very accommodating conscience. He holds in contempt the old-fashioned manly virtues of firmness and consistency, and is truly "a vane changed by every wind." If he votes with the Opposition to-day, it will only be

because he thinks them likely to be again in power; and it will, I really think, increase my contempt for him, if he does not do so.

There is an excellent letter in 'The Chronicle' to-day, purporting to come from the "chef de cuisine" at the Foreign Office. According to that, neither Mr. Canning nor Mr. Hammond speak French. This is, I think, hardly possible.

To DR. MITFORD, *Richardson's Hotel.*

May 29, 1807.

I am very happy I have seen Lord Blandford's,* my darling, as I should, if I had not, always have fancied it something superior. In good truth, I was greatly disappointed. The park, as they call it (if about eighty acres, without deer, can be called a park), is level, flat, and uninteresting; the trees are ill clumped; the walk round it is entirely unvaried, and the piece of water looks like a large duck pond, from the termination not being concealed. If the hothouses were placed together instead of being dispersed, they might make a respectable appearance; but, as it is, they bear evident marks of being built at different times (whenever, I suppose, he could borrow money for the purpose) and without any regular plan. Their contents might be interesting to a botanist, but gave me no great pleasure. The thing I best liked was the garden in which the conservatory is situated; the shrubs there are really very fine, particularly the azaleas, and the American honeysuckles both pink and yellow; the rhododendrons are superb.

We go out so much that my work does not proceed so fast as I could wish. I am very sorry for your

* Whiteknights, near Reading.

having affronted poor Mr. Bowles.* I hoped that through his means you would get acquainted with Walter Scott. As to Mr. Pratt,† he is, as you know, a great favourite with me. Poor, dear Sir Francis Burdett! surely they will not dare to prosecute him. Adieu, my darling! I am ever fondly yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

Bertram House, June 7, 1808.

I have received a very flattering letter from Sir William Elford. He requests to have copies of all my verses. They are not very voluminous; but, I fear, sufficiently so to try his patience. Assure him of my gratitude for his very kind letter, and tell him I will send him the copies he desires as soon as I know from you what verses he already has.

Poor Lady Charles‡ appears, I think, more desolate and miserable than ever. God knows what she would do without you. From the expenses of a school at Oxford (which is, I should suppose, much on the scale

* The poet.

† Samuel Jackson Pratt was originally a bookseller at Bath, and first attracted notice by a poem entitled, 'The Tears of Genius occasioned by the Death of Doctor Goldsmith.' He endeavoured to imitate the style of that celebrated author, and died in 1814, after having published a large number of works.

‡ Lord Charles Aynsley had died at Bocking in the course of the previous month. He was found to have large debts, which, by some arrangement of the Duke of Athole's, his widow's fortune was mulcted to liquidate. Mrs. Mitford, writing on the subject, says: "I am not satisfied with his Grace the Duke of Athole making our cousin such a cypher as not to have the management of her own estate. And I fear your uncle will be outrageous on the occasion. Surely she had resolution enough so to limit her expenses as to have discharged the debts in a few years, and yet have resided with a dignified economy in her own house."

of Mrs. Jesse's) it appears pretty evident that she must not think of sending the little girls to school. What employment could she have so useful or so interesting as instructing her children in the simple pursuits necessary for their age? Adieu. Ever with the most fond and sincere affection your own

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

[Miss Mitford seems to have retained a great affection for her governess at Hans Place, and at this time was most anxious for the success of a poem that lady had recently published. It is not impossible that Miss Rowden's aspirations may have kindled her own, for we find that her first literary labour was that of transcribing her manuscripts. She formed, as might have been expected, a much higher estimate than the public of the work in question, and one which in after years her calmer judgment led her to disallow.]

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

Bertram House, Feb. 7, 1809.

In my letter of yesterday, my beloved, you would find my high admiration of Miss Rowden's poem. It is an admiration that increases with every perusal, and I am confident that 'The Pleasures of Friendship' will occupy the same place with the celebrated works on 'Hope' and 'Memory.' I am very much obliged to Mr. Plomer* for his good opinion of my trifles; but I should be a thousand times more so if he would exert any influence he may have with those literary despots, the Edinburgh Reviewers, in favour of dear, dear

* It is impossible to decide who this gentleman was. The name is sometimes written Plomer, sometimes Plumer, and occasionally Plummer, in the MS.

Miss Rowden. Could you, without directly asking, find out to whom the concluding apostrophe of her canto is addressed? I think it is to Mr. St. Q.; and I should be certain of it if I could find any poetical precedent for calling a man "sweet," and if I did not think his amiable wife would, in case she discovered it, clapperclaw the unfortunate poetess. I have myself urged a request to be favoured with the second canto by your worship's return; which felicity, as you say nothing to the contrary, we may, I presume, hope for on Thursday; but you must expect, like all deceivers, not to be so punctually attended to this time as before.

Pray have you yet despatched my voluminous epistle to Bocking?

To Dr. Mitford, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

Bertram House, Feb. 9, 1809.

In the fear that we may not see you to-morrow, my darling, I send you a faint attempt to embalm the memory of the hero of Corunna. The subject is so very far above my powers, that mamma's persuasions alone induced me to write on it; and the verses were produced, as you see them, in less than two hours yesterday evening. I hope they will please you better than they do me. I fancy I am more than usually dissatisfied from the comparison I cannot avoid making between these and the exquisitely beautiful performance I have lately been engaged in examining. What a contrast! Such as they are, my dearest, take them, and do with them anything you like, except sending them to the 'Star.' How can I ever thank you for the pains you take for dear Miss Rowden? I must defer all gratitude till your return, and pay you in the old coin.

God bless you, my beloved father! I am ever most fondly your own

M. R. MITFORD.

Feb. 7, 1809.

TO THE MEMORY OF SIR JOHN MOORE.

Who has not felt exulting rapture's glow
For England's triumph o'er her haughty foe?
Who has not wept for England's gallant train,
The slaughtered victims of degenerate Spain?
Of every aid, of hope itself bereft
(Their firmness and their valour only left),
Let yon ensanguined plain their triumph tell,
Too dearly purchased—for their leader fell.
In Victory's arms thus Abercromby died;
Thus Nelson bled, our sorrow and our pride.
Still Britain mourns stern fate's relentless doom,
And twines the hero's laurels round his tomb.
Lamented chieftain! thy well-skilled command
From sure destruction saved thy faithful band.
'Twas thine with them each painful toil to share;
'Twas thine alone the mental pang to bear,
Whilst warring elements against thee rose,—
Before thee treacherous friends; behind thee foes:
And when at length Corunna's towers appeared,
And English vessels their proud ensigns reared,
'Twas thine to see thy bold pursuers fly,
Nobly to conquer, undismayed to die;
Thy parting words to filial duty given,
And thy last thought to England and to heaven!
No tawdry 'scutcheons hang around thy tomb,
No hired mourners wave the sabled plume,
No statues rise to mark the sacred spot,
No pealing organ swells the solemn note.
A hurried grave thy soldiers' hands prepare;
Thy soldiers' hands the mournful burthen bear;
The vaulted sky to earth's extremest verge
Thy canopy; the cannon's roar thy dirge!
Affection's sorrows dew thy lowly bier,
And weeping Valour sanctifies the tear. M. R. M.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

Bertram House, Feb. 17, 1809.

Mamma has told you much better than I could do, my beloved darling, the only objection to Miss Rowden's poem. Even she would fail in expressing our admiration; it is a most happy mixture of the polish of Rogers and the animation of Campbell.

One thing only I dread from the critics. They keep the unhappy bards whom they review so strictly to the letter of the law, that I fear they will think *Love* has encroached too much on the province of *Friendship*. Indeed, I think (exquisitely beautiful as are the verses in which she has described it) our first parents had very little to do with friendship. They derived alike their pleasure and consolation from love, and are not happily placed in the beginning of 'The Pleasures of Friendship.' This introduction of Adam and Eve appears to me to be the 'Original Sin' of the poem.

Busy as I was yesterday, I found time to read the newspaper. If it were not physically, as well as morally, impossible for Sheridan to blush, I should say that his face should glow with shame during the next month for his slavish speech on Friday. The vile degenerate Whig! But, however, as you are so fond of him, and most of his other friends have plenty of their own sins to answer for, it would be a proof of friendship if you would assume (what, on your own account must ever be a stranger to your cheeks) the blush of shame for his detestable conduct. God bless you! All the pets are well. My incipient cold (as Mr. L—— says) is better, and I am now and always most fondly your own

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

Do not omit to thank Mr. Wharton for the very great pleasure he has afforded me.* Miss Rowden had before read 'The Battle of Hohenlinden.' Is it not singular that she had not mentioned it? I would give ten years of my life to write such a poem.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, April 1, 1809.

I have the pleasure to inform you, my darling, that Maria has got six beautiful little ones, and that she and the dear family are as well as can be expected. The happy event took place last night, and put us, as you may well suppose, in no small consternation. I never saw so fond a mother. She is in the apartment destined for her, which I had desired to be cleaned for the purpose, and has a whole truss of straw for her bed. I have been to visit her, and she is gentle and affectionate as ever. Three of the puppies are black like herself, and a thousand times more polished and glossy than even she is; one like the father, one brindled, and one of a dusky colour, which will, I think, turn to a dead blue, like Miranda.

You and Mr. Plummer are undoubtedly the two best men upon the face of the earth. Oh, if you could but get Campbell to read it![†] I have no great fancy for Rogers,[‡] perhaps as much as anything from the spirit

* Richard Wharton, Esq., M.P. for Durham, was one of the joint secretaries of the Treasury in Spencer Perceval's administration, and author of a quarto poem called 'Roncevalles.'

† *i. e.*, 'The Pleasures of Friendship.'

‡ Rogers, although still in his prime, had not appeared before the public since the year 1798, having published 'The Pleasures of Memory'—the composition of which occupied him seventeen years—in 1792.

of contradiction; for I have been tormented by hearing his praises till I really cannot discover any merit he has, except polished diction and mellifluous versification. I dare not trust myself to talk of Campbell. I will read you his poem on your return.

You will see by the enclosure that I have kept my promise.* I fear the verses have more of the sound than the spirit of poetry. If you like them, you will probably take them to Lord Folkestone, and be guided by him as to whether you should send them to Colonel Wardle.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, April 27, 1809.

"Earl Grey dined yesterday with His Royal Highness the Duke of York, at his house in the Stableyard, and to-morrow he leaves town for his seat Alnwick in Northumberland!!"

The above paragraph I have copied from yesterday's 'Statesman' for your gratification. Oh, my sweet darling! you must now give up your Whigs, at least the late ministers and their adherents. That man (Lord Grey) must have an innate propensity to corruption, as some people are said to have for thieving; for in point of rank and fortune he is far above temptation.

[The following letter was written when Miss Mitford was on a visit to Miss Rowden, who was now mistress of the school in Hans Place, from which M. St. Quintin had retired.]

* In writing a copy of complimentary verses to Colonel Wardle, who with Lord Folkestone was great in popularity at the time, as the principal agitators against the Duke of York.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, May 20, 1809.

I am quite surprised, my dear darling, not to have heard from you to-day. We went out in such haste yesterday, that I had not even time to read over papa's letter; and I must beg you to pardon any repetitions you may find in this. Thursday was M. St. Quintin's birthday, and we had an elegant dinner upon the occasion. It is likewise, as you know, V——'s; but she, poor girl, was in no spirits to enjoy it. Her lover has just gone into the country for six months without coming to any declaration. Of course it is all off; and she only heard this dismal news the night before. I doubt not but she will soon get over it, for she is quite accustomed to these sorts of disappointments. We went yesterday to Miss Linwood's* and the panorama. I was much pleased with both, but most with the latter, which is a most admirable representation of Grand Cairo, taken from drawings brought by Lord Valentia. The windings of the Nile, and the perspective is so admirable that you may almost fancy yourself on the spot. Miss Linwood's has been fitted up at a most immense expense; upwards of five thousand pounds. It is indeed very superb. The rooms are hung with scarlet cloth, trimmed with a deep and beautiful fringe of black and gold; and the seats have blue silk canopies, drawn back by gold doves. Some of the pictures are placed in narrow intricate passages, most beautifully contrived to represent ruins, which, from the light falling solely on the pictures through painted glass, is the most complete deception I ever saw. These pictures are indeed charm-

* Miss Linwood's exhibition consisted of copies in needlework, by herself, from celebrated pictures of ancient and modern masters. They were really extraordinary works, had very much the effect of the originals, and the gallery was very popular for several years.

ing, especially 'Children warming themselves,' and 'Lady Jane Grey in Prison.' The saintlike meekness and resignation of Lady Jane, and the strong and bigotted expression of the bishop, are admirable.

On Monday we go to the exhibition, and dine with a large party at the St. Quintins'. Tuesday papa dines with the Friends of Reform, at the Crown and Anchor. I am now "sitting up to receive company;" but the weather is so unpleasant that it is not likely any will arrive.

I was at Hamlet's* yesterday with Fanny, and summoning to my aid all the philosophy of a literary lady, contrived to escape without purchasing anything—but it was a hard trial. The newest fashion is beautiful. Sets of precious stones of all colours, and even gold and diamonds, intermixed—without the slightest order or regularity. The effect is charming, but the price is enormous.

God bless you, my darling! I am ever and ever your own most fondly,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, May 23, 1809.

Your dear letter, my darling, did not arrive till this morning. There is great mismanagement somewhere. We had, indeed, a most delightful walk in Kensington Gardens on Sunday. They were quite crowded, and the weather was most propitious. I only saw two dresses alike, and those two were Miss Ximenes' and mine. If you remember, last year our cloaks and hats were alike. It is singular that it should again occur. The little heiress was very polite; she is looking

* The jeweller's.

better. I had, too, the honour of an introduction to Lord Folkestone, who was all affability. The people absolutely stopped to have a look at him; and well they might; for, independent of his political exertions, the present race of young men are such a set of frights, that he, though not very handsome, might pass for an Apollo amongst them. As we went with Miss V——, and of course at the fashionable hour, we were very late at Dr. Harness's. The gardens are now quite empty till four o clock, and are fullest at five. I think the *beau monde* will soon walk there by moonlight.

Yesterday we went to the exhibition, and never in my life did I encounter such a crowd. It is the worst I ever saw, consisting almost wholly of portraits; and I could scarce name a dozen pictures worth house-room. Wilkie's two paintings are admirable, and a few of Westall's, particularly a compartment of 'The Shield of Achilles,' and some very fine marine landscapes by Loutherbourg.

With a degree of imprudence for which I cannot account, we proceeded, after our three hours' squeeze, to the Exhibition of Water Colours in Spring Gardens, and there I was indeed delighted. It is impossible to enumerate the beauties of this collection. Heaphy, Glover, and Hills were pre-eminent in their different departments of figures, landscape, and cattle. The former has sold one of his pictures for four hundred guineas. We were so fortunate as to meet Mr. Hills, who escorted us to the most celebrated drawings, and was extremely polite and attentive.

After this fag we were obliged to walk into Piccadilly before we met with a coach; and I was so knocked up, that, instead of dining with papa and a party at the St. Quintins', I went to bed. To-day I

have quite recovered my fatigues; and Fanny and I are going to Bensley's to see the proof sheets of Rogers' new poem, and perhaps the dear man himself, with whom, you know, she is enamoured. *A propos* of Fanny, she is much recovered since my arrival. The second part of 'The Pleasures of Friendship' is superior to the first. To-morrow we go to the Haymarket to see 'A Cure for the Heartache' and 'The Critic,' and expect much amusement.

Alas! I boasted too soon about Hamlet's; we went there yesterday to see Lord Falkland's plate, and I was seduced into spending half a guinea on a ruby clasp. God bless you, my own darling! I am ever and ever most fondly your own

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, Thursday, May 26, 1809.

"The winds and the waves," says the sagacious Mr. Puff, "are the established receptacles of the sighs and tears of unhappy lovers." Now, my dear mamma, as there is little wind in this heated atmosphere, and as the muddy waters of the Thames would scarcely be purified by the crystal tears of all the gentle lovers in the metropolis, it would almost seem that my evil destiny has fixed on me to supply their place; for, from the staid and prudent lover of fifty, to the poor languishing maiden of twenty-five, I am the general confidante, and sighs and blushes, hopes and fears, are all "poured into my faithful bosom." It is inconceivable how that mischievous little urchin deadens all the faculties. Mary Mitford was bad enough, but even she, when we saw her at Bocking, was more rational than Victoire at this moment. By a mistake—so stupid

that it seemed as if we were all in love, and so divided that we knew not who to blame—we did not go to Bensley's on Tuesday; and papa waited there for us nearly two hours.

Yesterday we went to the play. Emery's acting was delightful, and we had excellent places. The house was very much crowded, but the heat was less than I expected. The "gods" were so vociferous for the second act of 'The Critic' that the performers were obliged to cut off some of the exquisite dialogue in the first. What a delightful thing it would be to have a playhouse without galleries! These very people, who curtailed some of the finest writing in the English language, encored five stupid songs! M. and Mrs. St. Quintin made their retreat before us, and appointed us to meet them at Grange's* after the play was over. Whilst we were there Fitzroy Stanhope came in. He had only been an hour in London, and had just taken his despatches from Oporto to the Duke of Portland's. You will see all the news in the papers, and foreign intelligence is so little interesting to me, that I should find it difficult to recapitulate what he said. On leaving Grange's, to our great surprise we found Lord Folkestone seated in the outer shop, and papa remained chatting with him.

[*The remainder of this letter is wanting.*]

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, May 27, 1809.

It was indeed most provoking, my dearest darling, that the people at Reading should detain papa's letter

* The well-known fruiterer's in Piccadilly, which used to be kept open till after the Opera closed, and was a very favourite resort at that late hour for fruit and ices.

from you at a time when the domestic confusion must have rendered it almost necessary to your comfort. We have our own troubles, my beloved; and I assure you, well as you know my talent for fidgetting, you never in your life saw me in such consternation as yesterday. I had not seen papa hardly yesterday or the day before, and he had sent me word that he would fetch me at four o'clock to go to the Thompsons, who mentioned five on the card as the dinner hour. At three o'clock, accordingly, I set about the grand affair of dressing, and at the very instant when I was completely stripped, literally *en chemise*, Mrs. Wilson and three other ladies knocked at the door. Luckily Fanny ordered the servant to deny me, and I escaped with the fright. At four precisely I descended *toute parée*, "in all the pride of beauty," as W—— H—— says, and waited for half an hour with tolerable patience; but when five o'clock struck and no news of papa, I was really in despair. It seemed to me so much more rational that I should call for papa, who was so near, than that he should come so far out of his way to fetch me, that I had little doubt but papa's message had been mistaken, and that he was fretting still more (if possible) at Hudson's. We accordingly set out, for Fanny would not trust me to go to Covent Garden alone; and happily in the very midst of Piccadilly all my fears were relieved by seeing him jogging along quietly in a coach. We stopped him, and he laughed very heartily at my simplicity in thinking they would dine before six. I know you are too good a heretic, my dearest mother, to believe in the popish doctrine of purgatory, but I have often found that, when we have encountered difficulties in getting to a place and feel a sort of presentiment of disappointment, we have, as a reward, found the greatest pleasure—a pleasure

doubly delightful from its being totally unexpected. And so it proved with me. I never in my life spent a more agreeable day. Mrs. Plummer, a young lady with her, and Mrs. and Miss Thompson were the only ladies; but there were several very pleasant men, and a most excellent dinner, with very amusing conversation. They were all engaged to a ball at Mr. Brett's, at Brompton, and Miss Thompson declared she would not go unless I would accompany them, and allow her to introduce me as her friend. To be her friend is indeed the height of my ambition, for I never saw a more charming and unaffected girl. I had but one objection, and that they obviated by my calling on Miss Rowden on our way; and about eleven o'clock we proceeded to this most magnificent entertainment. And indeed, my dear mother, it well deserves the name. There were five splendid rooms open in a suite, and upwards of three hundred people. The supper was most elegant; every delicacy of the season was in profusion; and the chalked floors and Grecian lamps gave it the appearance of a fairy scene, which was still further heightened by the beautiful exotics which almost lined these superb apartments. The flowers were indeed so fragrant, so brilliant, and so numerous, that it seemed as if half the nursery gardens had emptied their stores into the house; but we were told they all came from Mr. Brett's own hot-house and conservatory. I danced till five this morning—the two first with Mr. Leigh (Mrs. Thompson's brother), who accompanied us; the two second with papa's friend, Mr. Stewart; and the two last (or rather one last, for I was quite fatigued, and obliged to give in) with a Mr. Barker, a very handsome and elegant young man. But though my partners were all uncommonly pleasant, I do assure

you, dear mamma, I am still heart-whole; and I do not think I am in much danger from the attractions of Bertram Mitford.

On Wednesday we dine at the Plummers'. Whether papa had talked so much of Mr. P. that my expectations were too highly raised, I know not; but I was certainly disappointed in him. He is very ugly, and in manner a bad copy of old Joy. This is very ungrateful; for he was very civil (too civil by half) to me. But I always tell you all that I think. Mrs. Plummer still continues to remind me of Lady Charles, and you know how very pleasant she can make herself. It is impossible for any one to be a more agreeable chaperon. You must forgive all my stupidity, dear mamma, for raking all night is no brightener of the fancy; and I think myself well off in having escaped any other ill consequence from the heat and fatigue I encountered. The worst of the affair has been a total destruction of gloves and shoes, and no great good to my lilac gown.

How kind you are to my pets! My poor friend is too far gone for *raillerie*. The evil must cure itself. Nothing drives an old lover out of her head but a new one; and that she will probably pick up in her summer excursion—for they are going to Colonel Nugent's, to Cheltenham, and to Margate; which is, you will allow, a pretty tolerable tour. I hope George is better. God bless you, my darling! I long for you twenty times a day. I am ever most fondly your own

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

Hans Place, May 29, 1809.

We had a most delightful day yesterday at the Wilsons', my dearest darling, but as you and I do not

deal in generalities, I will give you my account in detail. Six o'clock was the appointed dinner-hour; but they were so detained in the Gardens, that when we arrived the ladies were not returned; but very soon after our entrance papa's friend, Lord Suffolk, who is a most charming old man, made his appearance, and was followed by Captain and Miss Ogle (children of the Ogle of Cansey Park), and several very pleasant gentlemen.

Bertram Mitford was invited, but he had an engagement he could not dispense with, even to meet "the clever Mary Mitford," the name by which I find he distinguishes me from three other Mary Mitfords, his sister, his cousin, and our own Mary at Morpeth. Young Ogle, who is a member of his club and his bosom friend, is quite a puppy; he wears diamond knee-buckles, which cost eighty guineas. This is a sufficient specimen.

From MRS. MITFORD.

Bertram House, May 31, 1809.

I was certain, my dear and best beloved girl, that whenever you came to have any conversation with Mrs. Wilson, she would give you very unreservedly her sentiments respecting matters at Bocking. The Egyptian mummies will be *au désespoir*, and every soul in the neighbourhood will canvass and condemn the conduct of our right honourable relation, should a union between her and J. T. Nott take place. I recollect formerly to have read or rather seen an old book entitled 'Pious Frauds,' evidently written to expose the errors of the popish clergy and monks, and bring their acts into disrepute, by showing the immorality of their lives, so totally different from the doctrine they held forth to their fol-

lowers, by whom they wished to be considered as patterns of sanctity.

If the dissertation on the prophecies is made the medium of a correspondence, to bring about a matrimonial alliance, it may, I think, not unjustly be considered as a pious fraud on the part of the authors, yet I must own I still have my doubts as to such an event taking place.

I must now proceed to tell you that I spent a very agreeable day at the Valpys' yesterday. The Doctor I never saw so generally attentive and agreeable both to the males and females who surrounded their festive board. Mr. and Mrs. Culham, but not the Misses, the eldest being almost distracted with a violent toothache, Mr. and Miss Blagrow, Mr. and Miss Joy, Mrs. Women and Miss Peacock, Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Fell, Mr. J. Simson, M.P., and Mrs. Gordon. The dinner was very good, two full courses with one remove, the soup giving place to a quarter of lamb at the bottom of the table.

Ever your affectionate,

MARY MITFORD.

[The performance mentioned in the next letter was for Kelly's benefit, and consisted of an English tragedy, a concert with Italian singers, and a French ballet. Michael Kelly was not only the most popular English male singer of his day but composed the music of several ballad operas. He was also a wine merchant. Sheridan called him "a composer of wine and importer of music."]

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, June 4, 1809.

In the few words I wrote to you yesterday, my darling, I had not time or room to tell you how very

much I was gratified at the Opera House, on Friday evening. I dined at the St. Quintins', and we proceeded (Mr. and Mrs. Danvers, Miss Tonge, Victoire, Mr. St. Q. and myself) to take possession of our very excellent situation, a pit box near the stage and next to the Prince's. The house was crammed to suffocation. Young is an admirable actor; I greatly prefer him to Kemble, whom I had before seen in the same character (Zanga in 'The Revenge'). His acting, indeed, is more in the style of our favourite Cooke, and he went through the whole of his most fatiguing character with a spirit which surprised every one. A curious circumstance happened—not one of the party was provided with that article, so essential at tragedy, yclept a handkerchief; and had not papa (who met us there) supplied the weeping beauties with this necessary appendage, they would have borne some resemblance to a collection of blurred schoolboys. To me, you know, this was of no consequence, for I never cry at a play; though few people, I believe, enter more warmly into its beauties. Billington, Braham, Bianchi, Naldi, Bellamy, and Siboni sung after the play, and the amateurs were highly gratified. But my delight was yet to come. The dancing of Vestris is indeed perfection. The 'poetry of motion' is exemplified in every movement, and his Apollo-like form excels any idea I had ever formed of manly grace. Angiolini is a very fine dancer, but her figure by no means equals Vestris's, and I had no eyes for her while he remained upon the stage. The ballet was in itself magnificent, but the last scene excelled in splendour any I had ever seen.

It was one o'clock before we returned; and at ten the next morning Fanny and I set out to make our round of visits in a very handsome landau barouche

with our new servant. We went first to Mr. Annesley's, who is looking well and made abundance of inquiries for you. Then to Dr. Harness's in Upper Berkeley Street, next to Lady Macclesfield's. I cannot describe to you, my dear mother, the kindness of my reception. They had hoped to see me to dinner if I had remained longer, and would never forgive me if I came to town without calling there. No news of Zosia !* From thence we proceeded to the Thompsons'. Miss T. was as charming as ever. To-day (for I write on Sunday, fearing I shall have no time to-morrow) I hope to see Cobbett,† and am going to the Gardens with Mr. and Mrs. Danvers, and dine with them.

To-morrow we go first to Bedlam; then to St. James's Street to see the Court people; and then I think I shall have had more than enough of sights and dissipation. You cannot imagine, my dearest mamma, how much I long to return home, and to tell you all the anecdotes I have picked up, and pet my poor deserted darlings. I would have given up any pleasure I have partaken here to have seen the dear bullfinches eat their first strawberries. A thousand thanks for your charming letter. I wish you may be able to decipher my scrawl. Pale pink or pale blue pelisses are certainly worn; but mantles are far more stylish; and anything of a spring colour is quited unheard of. God bless you, dearest

* A late schoolmate of Miss Mitford's, a Polish young lady, who, while in England, was under the care of Lady Macclesfield.

† Cobbett was an intimate friend of Dr. Mitford. The acquaintance between them, which originated in their love of coursing, was continued owing to their political sympathies. Some of Cobbett's letters to the Doctor are written enigmatically, and evidently with a view to secresy; whilst others express his sentiments as openly as the 'Porcupine,' and conclude with the characteristic wish, "God bless you and d—— the Ministers!"

dear mamma! I have the less scruple in filling this, as papa will certainly not have time to write, and as we shall meet on Tuesday evening. Ever and ever your own most fondly,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

Did I tell you that the high and mighty Countess D'Oyerhauser called on me immediately after her return from Bath? She sets up for a *femme savante*, attends the blue-stocking meetings at Lady Cork's, and all the literary societies where she can find or make an entrance. She is therefore in raptures at finding a fresh poetess, and we are going there this evening. I must tell you a good trait of this literary lady, who can scarcely speak a word of English. She was to meet Scott on Tuesday, and wanted to borrow a 'Marmion,' that she might have two or three lines to quote in the course of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

Letters for 1810.

The first work which Miss Mitford published was her 'Miscellaneous Poems,' which appeared in 1810. It consisted principally of a collection of short fugitive pieces written at an earlier period; some were in honour of her father's friends, such as Cobbett, Wardle, and Fox, while others recorded her own pursuits and predilections in the season of childhood. Her taste for flowers had grown up with her from infancy :—

> Oh, still how fresh to memory's eyes
> Those hours of childish bliss arise!
> Where in the deep and tangled dell,
> I plucked the flowers I loved so well;
> Or on the primrose bank reclined
> Gay bouquets formed or garlands twined;
> Decked hat and frock in flowery state,
> And tottered with the fragrant weight;
> And still no infant better loves
> To view the primrose-spangled groves.

She entertained the idea of dedicating these poems to Lord Holland or Coke of Norfolk, but the Hon. William Herbert was finally selected for this distinction. He was a brother of Lord Carnarvon, and had himself published poetical translations from German, Danish, and Icelandic authors.

The following letters refer to these 'Miscellaneous Poems:'—

To Dr. Mitford, *Bath Hotel, Arlington Street.*

Bertram House, Jan. 28, 1810.

I must entreat, my dearest, you not to curtail any of the verses to you. I speak not only with the fondness of a daughter, but with the sensibility (call it irritability, if you like it better) of a poet, when I assure you that it will be impossible to omit any of the lines without destroying the effect of the whole; and there is no reason, none whatever, excepting *your extreme modesty*,* why any part of them should be suppressed. I shall expect to see them *all* printed.

I hope you will receive poor Moses† safe. John said their parting scene was extremely tragical; for he remained howling with his eyes fixed upon him as long as the coach was in sight. Tell dear Vic. to take care of him for my sake. I bade him love his fair new mistress when I took leave of him. All the pets are well. Heaven bless you, my darling!

Ever fondly your own,

M. R. Mitford.

Was not Burdett's a fine speech on Thursday?

To Dr. Mitford, *Bath Hotel, Arlington Street.*

Bertram House, Feb. 2, 1810.

I am in the horrors respecting the advertisement to be prefixed to the poems, which will soon, I suppose, be wanted. It is usual for people to give some reasons for publishing; but I *cannot*, you know, my darling, for the best of all possible reasons—because I have none to

* He was remarkably innocent of this quality.

† Moses was one of the Doctor's greyhounds.

give. Apologies are sufficiently needed, but I had rather write such another volume than undertake to compose any; and I have a great mind to turn it out naked into the great sea, the world (as the Indians are reported to do by their children), and let it sink or swim as it may.

"I can make nothing of your history respecting 'the Pen and the Sword,' and begin to have my suspicions that it is the old trite story of some Sardinian marquis, who, finding he could not live upon his nobility, wisely resolved to let it lie dormant for a while, and apply to commerce; and, having realized a splendid fortune, resumed his sword and his title, *dans une scène* abounding with pomp, splendour, and sentiment. I am not quite sure of the country of this prudent personage; but the anecdote is quite familiar to me, and I dare say to all the world; for I am sure I have met with it in a thousand forms, from the humble 'Recueil Choisi,' where I first read it, to the aspiring 'Comédie Larmoyante,' where it is decked out in all the glitter and nonsense of French phrases and French sentiment. If this be really the case, you need not trouble yourself to bring it to me, for I should as soon think of versifying the old story of Canute and the sea, as of writing on so trite and hackneyed a subject.

Wonder as long as you choose at my boldness, but *my* idea of 'the Sword and the Pen' embraces the high and inspiring themes of which they are the symbols—war and literature. The contrast is beautiful; and, though I know my powers will sink under the mighty grandeur of the subject, I certainly shall attempt to write a desultory poem with that title.

Have you seen Colonel Wardle? If it were possible for me to admire him more, I certainly should

have felt an increase of my veneration for him from his speech at Guildhall. It had all the simplicity of genius. Your Whigs (by-the-by, how shamefully they have behaved to Lord Cochrane) would have embraced the opportunity to make a long showy oration—would have

"Talked about it, goddess, and about it,"

till the heads of their auditors would have been as bewildered as their own.

God bless you, my darling! Maria* reminds me to send her love and duty, and I am ever and ever your own

Most truly and fondly,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Bath Hotel, Arlington Street.*

Bertram House, Feb. 19, 1810.

I was not surprised to find you did not like the tale, for I knew it would not suit your taste. The catastrophe might be easily altered; but I am not disposed to take any more trouble about it; and, if you had known your own mind respecting the quantity of poetry necessary for the volume, I should never have thought of writing this *immoral* production. As, however, I am by no means desirous of having it hawked about among your canting friends, I shall be much obliged to you to put your copy into the fire. You need not fear my destroying my own, for I think too well of it.

The Italian motto is as follows:—

"Trema parlando; e i detti
Fa tronchi ed imperfetti."

I would send you the translation; but I have no copy and no time to write another.

* Maria, a pet greyhound.

From seeing none of the Political Poems printed, I take it for granted they are to be omitted. I must console myself for the insipidity of my volume by recollecting the description Pope gives of his first production—

"Where pure description held the place of sense."

But Heaven preserve me from the vanity of comparing any poem of mine to 'Windsor Forest,' though the line is applicable to both.

Heaven bless you, my dearest! I am not angry with you, though extremely provoked at those canting Scotchmen. If any of my things are worth reading, I am sure that poor tale is; and who reads a volume of poems to glean moral axioms? What moral, indeed, have our most celebrated tales? what is the moral of 'Glenfinlas?' what of 'The Hall of Justice?' and what of that most exquisite of all human productions 'Gertrude of Wyoming?' So that there is nothing offensive to delicacy or good taste, it is sufficient; and I never should think of writing a poem with a sermon tacked to its tail. God bless you again, my beloved! I long to see you. Ever fondly your own,

M. R. M.

[The printer of this work was A. J. Valpy, nephew of the well-known Dr. Valpy. He had recently set up in business; and the bill, for which immediate payment was demanded, amounted to 59*l.* It seemed much for five hundred copies of so small a volume.]

To Dr. Mitford, *Bath Hotel, Arlington Street.*

March 2, 1810.

I was quite shocked, my darling, at the bill, which is really exorbitant. Do you know that if the whole

edition is sold in a twelvemonth (a thing I do not expect), we shall not gain fifty pounds? If ever I write again I will sell the copyright. The charge of four pounds odd for labels and alterations is scandalous. *Alterations*, indeed, I made none; and they certainly ought to pay for their own blunders. The word is, I suppose, in great favour with the young printer, for he has actually inserted it instead of 'Errata'—very improperly, for they are all misprints. If you send the copies intended for your relations to me, I shall want twenty copies. I must also write in those that go to Mr. Mayne, &c.—This is absolutely ruinous!

God bless you, my darling! Ever most fondly

M. R. M.

[Lady Charles Aynsley appears to have had some poetical aspirations, and among other attempts wrote a fulsome address to Louis the Eighteenth, who was then in exile and residing at Hartwell. As Miss Mitford was very proficient in French, Lady Charles sent it to her for translation, and she observes that it was full of faults, and scarcely worth the trouble. Lady Charles afterwards wrote an epitaph on her husband, to which there is an allusion in the following letter.]

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, March 17, 1810.

Think of the impudence of our lady cousin, to dovetail in two lines of Crabbe's with her own vile stuff (for the first four lines are so extremely bad that I really believe they are her own), and then to send them here, and think I should not find them out! I knew them at first sight. Lord of mercy, how affronted she would have been if any one else had quoted verses

upon an old sexton and applied them to her dear, dead lord! her sainted lord! her angel lord! and Heaven knows how many lords besides! I wish J—— V—— had been at home to receive the horsewhipping you did him the honour to intend him, my beloved. His father's name and influence must be powerful, indeed, if it gets him on in the world, for he has no one requisite for a tradesman.

Ten thousand thanks for the management of the Reviews. Mr. Warton is an angel of a man. Dead angels are common enough (*vide* Mrs. Opie's Life of her Husband, or Lady C—— A——'s Letters), but living ones are scarce indeed. I am sadly afraid of not being noticed in the 'Edinburgh,' the volume is so trifling. Mr. Warton and Mr. Dyke are very kind in taking so great a part in my anxiety. Thursday will, I hope, bring some news. Did I, in my hurry last night, make you comprehend that I had not copies enough for Mr. Sheridan and our friends in Hans Place? You will be so good as to convey one to each; and there is not the slightest occasion to send any down here, as it does not signify whether I write in Mr. Sheridan's; and I can supply the omission in Mr. St. Q.'s, and dear Miss Rowden's, when I come to town.

Do not forget that, if the tax money be not paid early this week, you will be reported as a defaulter; and your friends the ministers would take great delight in popping you up. Do you think they will be able to stand?

God bless you, my dearest, best beloved! Ever most fondly your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, March 27.

A letter came from Thompson Martin this morning which, knowing the hand, mamma opened. It was to request you would let him take the choice of your pictures.* I wrote a note to say, generally, that you had been in town for the last two months, and were still there; but that you would probably return next week to attend the grand jury, and would undoubtedly take an early opportunity of calling upon him. Was not this right? You will collect from this that we have received a summons from the under-sheriff, which was given over the pale to William this morning.

Heaven bless you, my beloved! Remember me to all friends, and believe me ever most fondly your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

How delighted I am that Mr. Herbert is pleased with the Dedication! I hope he will introduce me to his charming wife.

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, Wednesday,
March 28, 1810.

You have misunderstood mamma, dear love, respecting the nonsense she chose to call verses, which never had "a local habitation."† This dear mamma, who

* In payment of taxes.

† This refers to a passage in a letter of Mrs. Mitford's to the Doctor, in which she says: "To amuse me on Friday evening, Mary produced a most ingenious poetic effusion on the unfortunate fate of Mr. Turnbull's Ode. I, who always wish you to share in all my gratifications, wanted her either to take it down with her pencil or let me. As you know all the actors in the transaction, you would, I am sure, have been delighted at the humorous manner in which Mr. Turnbull was delineated, as neither

never, you know, talks anything but sense herself, is often, as we can tell by experience, much amused by nonsense; and to divert her during her illness, I exerted my improvisatore talents in some very ridiculous burlesque verses about Mr. Turnbull's Ode.* I succeeded in making her laugh, and you may be well assured that I would not for the world commit such impertinence to paper, the more especially as it concerned one to whom I owe respect and gratitude.

It is very kind of Mr. Perry† to invite you to meet Mr. Brougham, and I am sure it will be greatly in my favour. You advertise my poems *vivâ voce* you know, my dearest, and your manners and conversation are the greatest recommendations. He will overlook the daughter's defects in the father's excellences.‡ You read the state of parties in the 'Edinburgh Review;' did you read the article on Female Education? I got it only last night, and was beyond measure charmed by it. Perhaps they lay too great a stress on the learned languages which, having strangely enough censured in boys' education, they now recommend to girls, by way, I suppose, of making the *amende honorable* to the classics. Pray read it and ask my dear Miss Rowden her opinion of it. She is, without any system at all, just such a woman as their plan aspires to form. Find out, if you can, who wrote it.

I wish this foolish ball was at York! I have been

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his rusty coat, his brown scratch, or even his dirty hands were omitted. Had my eloquence been as persuasive as Mr. Turnbull's you might have been much amused: but I could not prevail."

* Written in honour of Miss Mitford.

† Editor of the 'Morning Chronicle' in the bright and palmy days of that newspaper.

‡ This filial blindness to her father's rough manner and loud talk is perfectly unaccountable.

busy all night in forming plans for a poem on woman, which will now all evaporate, for I can only write in an evening; and, as Mrs. R—— will probably stay two or three days, every vestige will be lost before she takes her departure. Do not you think it a good subject for a female poet? Do not mention it, my beloved darling.

If the House of Commons send Sir Francis to the Tower, I should not much like any one that I loved to be a party in it, for the populace will not tamely submit to have their idol torn from them, and especially for defending the rights and liberties of the subject. As to Sir Francis himself, I don't think either he or Cobbett would much mind it. They would proclaim themselves martyrs in the cause of liberty, and the 'Register' would sell better than ever. God bless you, my beloved! Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

TO MISS MITFORD.

March 29, 1810.

Fair nymph, my Arctic harp unstrung
Mute on the favourite pine is hung;
No beam awakes the airy soul
Which o'er its chords wild warbling stole:
No more I cull the flowers that blow
Deep bosom'd in Halcya's snow,
The sweets to infant Science dear
First offerings of the northern year,
Which opening with new charms appear'd
On the rude lap of Nature rear'd:
Nor those which plucked with nicest care,
Adorned fair Hafnia's* mildest air,
Transplanted from their wintry shore,
And, nursed by antiquarian lore,

* Copenhagen.

To raise once more the drooping head,
And Nature's wildest fragrance spread.

O night of horror when the blow,
Which should have smote a crested foe,
Laid that calm bower of Science low!
Peace to the souls of those who bled
For England, to their ruin led!
Peace to the honoured limbs that lie
Shrouded by fruitless victory!

* * * * *

Thou, tuneful maid, thy ardent song
Shall tell of Hafnia's bitter wrong:
Thy pen has force with magic word
To blast the fierce-consuming sword.
For not poetic fire alone
Is thine to warm a breast of stone;
But thou hast quaffed the purest rays
That round the patriot's forehead blaze:
And gentlest as thy feelings flow,
Alive to sympathy of woe,
Awake to all the tender charms
That lie embowered in Nature's arms;
Yet did thine opening judgment learn
Man's noblest nature to discern,
To bless the self-devoted hand
That falls to save its native land,
To own the majesty of Right,
But curse the fell destroyer's might.

W. HERBERT.

TO THE HON. WILLIAM HERBERT.

Oh gifted bard! Awake again
For Hafnia's wrongs the lofty strain;
Awake again that night of woe,
That laid her friendly turrets low;
When wide o'er northern seas the flame
Spread Denmark's wrongs and England's shame;
When Folly lit the funeral pyre
And Albion's glory fed the fire:

Awake the strain where keen and high
Glows 'all the poet's ecstasy;'
The ardent strain that soars sublime,
And spurns the bounds of space and time;
Now softer than the Tuscan breeze
Murmuring through clustered olive trees:
Now wilder than the storm that roars
Round Iceland's desolated shores.
For me—unskilful to prolong
The finely modulated song—
Whose simple lay spontaneous flows
As Nature charms or feeling glows,
Wild, broken, artless as the strains
Of linnets on my native plains,
And timid as the startled dove,
Scared at each breeze that waves the grove;
Still may that trembling verse have power
To cheer the solitary hour,
Of spring's life-giving beauties tell,
Or wake at friendship's call the spell.
Enough to bless my simple lays,
That muse-loved Herbert deigned to praise.

March 31, 1810. M. R. M.

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, April 3, 1810.

Ten thousand thanks for your attention to my commissions, and, above all, for the books. Crabbe's poem* is indeed a rich treat. It is quite to your taste; and I will read it to you all through when you return. I believe he is *your* favourite poet; next to Campbell he undoubtedly stands in my estimation; and

* 'The Borough.' After having retired from the world of letters, and been generally supposed to be dead, Crabbe reappeared as an octogenarian in 1810, and published this poem, followed by 'Tales in Verse.'

I think he is more original than even he, and that with all the finish and accuracy of the Dutch painters.

I have read with great attention Mr. Blackett's* specimens. There is a great deal of genius and power in most of them; and I think Mr. Pratt has done his *protégé* great injustice by comparing him to that feeble verse-spinner Bloomfield.† It is sacrilege, in my opinion, even to name Shakespeare in speaking of

"Dwindled sons of little men;"

but if these specimens be fairly selected, and he continue to write and improve, he may approach very nearly to the standard of our *only* tragic poet of the present day, Joanna Baillie. This is something like a lawyer's opinion, sagely guarded with "ifs" and "buts," which are extremely proper in all prophecies concerning poetical prodigies. As to Mr. Pratt's 'Contrast,' the poetry is good, and the politics are execrable.

I am very sorry to hear so indifferent an account of poor Captain Mitford's Greece. I am a little interested for him, poor man; and I really cannot help it. He is a Mitford.

I cannot write about Copenhagen, nor indeed about anything just now. In the midst of my delight at Crabbe's poem, I feel a sort of unspeakable humiliation, much like what a farthing candle (if it could feel) would experience when the sun rises in all his glory and ex-

* A self-instructed poet, of whose verses two volumes were published under the auspices of Mr. Pratt.

† Bloomfield was an agricultural labourer, whose first poem, 'The Farmer's Boy,' had great popularity. He was a *protégé* of Mr. Capel Loft.

tinguishes its feeble rays. God bless you, my dear love!

Ever and ever your own,
M. R. M.

To Dr. Mitford, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, April 4, 1810.

Mamma was quite right, my dearest papa, when she told you that, before my quack recipe arrived, I should be too well to need it. You and I are constitutionally, as well as personally, alike; and to go to bed dying and rise the next morning perfectly recovered is common to both.

Mr. Herbert does me a very great honour in thinking me adequate to the Copenhagen subject; but he is mistaken in his very partial estimate of my talents, which are totally unequal to such an undertaking. And to tell you the truth (which I beg you will not tell him) I do not think I would write upon it, even if I could. Cobbett would never forgive me for such an atrocious offence; and I would not offend him to please all the poets in the kingdom.

How totally reviewers have mistaken matters, in attributing my political fancies to you! They would have been more correct if they had asserted a directly contrary opinion; for Cobbett is your favourite because he is mine.

Will you make my grateful acknowledgments to Mr. Pratt for his kind approbation of my trifling volume, and for his own elegant verses, which I most anxiously expect. He is a steady Royalist, I know, and surely he ought not to have omitted our beautiful and kingly county in his charming 'Gleanings.' I am

not quite disinterested in wishing him to repair this omission; for we should then have the pleasure of seeing him. Do not forget to ask if he has sung the praises of greyhounds, the most graceful and the most attached of all the canine race.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,
M. R. MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, April 6, 1810.

Crabbe's poem is too long and contains too gloomy a picture of the world. This is real life, perhaps; but a little poetical fairy land, something to love and admire, is absolutely necessary as a relief to the feelings, among his long list of follies and crimes. Excepting one poor girl weeping over the grave of her lover there is not one chaste female through the whole book. This is shocking, is it not, my darling? I dare say he is some *crabbed* old bachelor, and deserves to be tossed in a blanket for his contempt of the sex.*

How do you like Mr. Pratt, and what does he say? Shall I be reviewed next number in the 'Monthly?' Will the 'Edinburgh' condescend to notice me? There is a string of questions for you, my best beloved. Ever and ever your own most fondly,

M. R. MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Sunday, April 8, 1810.

I cannot agree with you respecting our poor cousin Bertram; he has certainly fought a duel. If his

* This was a most erroneous guess. Crabbe was not only a husband and a father, but very fond of female society.

antagonist be dead, it will be a very alarming affair; for though, individually, I have no very great regard for him, yet it would be a most deplorable catastrophe if the head of our house, the ancient family of Mitford, should come to be hanged.

Oh, my darling! how I envy you to be at the fountain-head of intelligence in these interesting times. How I envy Lady Burdett for the fine opportunity she has to show the heroism of our sex. He is a glorious man, and I hope, for his sake and the sake of the country, that the House of Commons will rescind their resolutions.

Ever fondly yours,
M. R. MITFORD.

The following is to her cousin:—

TO MARY. MAY 1, 1810.

Again, sweet maid, the brilliant ray
Smiles joyous on the youthful May.
She lies not now in torpor lapt,
In clouds, in gloom, and darkness wrapt,
Despoiled of all her blooming charms,
Lingering in hoary winter's arms,
But in her pride of beauty leads
The rosy hours on Flora's meads,
With laughing pleasures in her train
Trips o'er the gay enamelled plain,
And health, and joy, and gladness gives
To all that breathes, and moves, and lives.
How balmy is the fragrant morn
When dewdrops deck the snowy thorn!
How bright, how varying, in the beam
Of noon, the flowery valleys gleam!
How sweetly fair the twilight pale
Wraps Nature in her dewy veil!

Then evening comes—away, away,
Ye visions of enchantment gay!
Fancy, away! on this blest spot,
In May's sweet eve we need thee not.
Enough for us fair Nature's power,
Spring's balmy grace, and evening's hour;
Fairer than all that fancy drew
The living landscape springs to view,
Beneath fair Cynthia's trembling ray,
Silvering the elms' fantastic spray.

'Tis from that hill whose beech-crowned brow
O'erlooks the smiling vale below,
An amphitheatre around
High woodlands the fair prospect bound.
Deep in the vale the gathering shade
Adds gloom to each embowering glade,
Save where on some low cottage wall
The moon's pale beams wild quivering fall;
Cast o'er the cot their modest light
Or gleam upon the casement bright;
Save where the shallow peaceful stream
A waveless mirror seems to beam.
The clustering elms in hoary pride
The stately oaks hang o'er the tide,
And yon rude bridge in antique state
Trembles beneath the peasants' weight;
Save where amid the general gloom
One cherish'd spot those rays illume;
It is a modest mansion fair,
And taste has spread his beauties there.
My Mary, know'st thou not the dome?
The seat of peace—my lovely home—
Lovely and most beloved; though now
Alone I seek the hill's fair brow;
Alone I tread the verdant plain
And sigh for thee, and sigh in vain.

To Dr. Mitford, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, May 10, 1810.

I find with great regret, from your letter to-day, that our kind, good friend, Sir William Elford, has really left town. I trusted to the attractions of the metropolis, and the known instability of all you male part of the creation, to detain him till the arrival of my little volume, which you have, I hope, already despatched to Bath, with one of your dear, beautiful letters, for the sooner a compliment of that kind is paid the more graceful it appears. A Devonshire cottage painted by him will be the greatest treasure I can possess. It will rival Maria: you know how much this is saying.

And now let me give you a little serious advice, my dear son and heir. If those Raybould people do not give you a secure *indemnity*, stir not a finger in this business. Let them "Go to the devil and shake themselves,"* for I would not trust one of them with a basket of biscuits to feed my dogs. They have no more honour between them all than you "might put upon the point of a knife, and not choke a daw withal," so comfort yourself accordingly; treat them as you would lawyers or the king's ministers, or any other fraternity of known rogues and robbers.

[Miss Mitford occasionally visited London in the spring of 1810, and was then introduced for the first time to Sir William Elford, a friend of her father's. He was a fellow of the Royal and Linnæan Societies, and recorder of Plymouth, which borough he also represented in Parliament for many years. Mr. Pitt had created

* The name of a dance, then fashionable.

him a baronet in 1800; and Sir William was now verging upon sixty-four. His three children died in his lifetime. The allusion in the following letter is to a landscape he had promised the young poetess—he was an exhibitor in the Royal Academy—and in return for which she had forwarded him, on her return home, a copy of her late work.]

To Sir William Elford, Bart., *Bickham, Plymouth.*

London, May 26, 1810.

My dear Sir,

Your most kind but too flattering letter followed me here two days ago, and I gladly avail myself of your permission to express my heartfelt gratitude for the indulgence with which you have received the trifling volume I had the honour to send you.

For the distinguished favour you mean to confer on me, I cannot sufficiently thank you. Highly valuable it will doubtless be in itself, and I shall consider it inestimable as a proof of your good opinion. Indeed, Sir William, your praise has made me very vain. It is impossible not to be elated by such approbation, however little I may have deserved it.

Will you not think me an encroacher if, even while acknowledging one favour, I sue for another? Much as I have heard of your charming poetical talent, I have never seen any of your verses, and, if it be not too much to ask, I would implore you to send me at least a specimen. Forgive this request if you do not comply with it, and believe me, dear Sir, with great respect,

Your obliged and grateful,

Mary Russell Mitford.

To Sir William Elford, Bart., *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, July 3, 1810.

My dear Sir,

To tell you how much I was gratified by the specimen you have been so good as to send me would be impossible. I was prepared to expect charming *Vers de Société*, full of wit and gaiety, but the fire and boldness of the 'Address to Mrs. Siddons' astonished as much as delighted me. The two lines—

> "That from her voice the blind her looks declare
> And in her speaking eyes the deaf may hear,"

appear to be equally happy and original.

You are quite right in believing my fondness for rural scenery to be sincere; and yet one is apt to fall into the prevailing cant upon those subjects. And I am generally so happy everywhere, that I was never quite sure of it myself, till, during the latter part of my stay in town, the sight of a rose, the fragrance of a honeysuckle, and even the trees in Kensington Gardens excited nothing but fruitless wishes for our own flowers and our own peaceful woodlands. Having ascertained the fact, I am unwilling to examine the motives; for I fear that indolence of mind and body would find a conspicuous place amongst them. There is no trouble or exertion in admiring a beautiful view, listening to a murmuring stream, or reading poetry under the shade of an old oak; and I am afraid that is why I love them so well.

It is impossible to mention poetry without thinking of Walter Scott. It would be equally presumptuous in me either to praise or blame 'The Lady of the Lake;'

but I should like to have your opinion of that splendid and interesting production. Have you read a poem which is said to have excited the jealousy of our great modern minstrel, 'The Fight of Falkirk?'* I was delighted with the fire and genius which it displays, and was the more readily charmed, perhaps, as the author is a lady; which is, I hear, what most displeases Mr. Scott.

I enclose you 'Robert Jeffery's Lament,' altered according to your suggestions. The old termination was very bad, and I am afraid the new one is not much better; but it is the best I can do for him. And you must be aware, my dear Sir William, that, however easy it may be to kill a man, it is very difficult to bring him to life again. This little poem is not inscribed to you, because I am presumptuous enough to hope that at some future period you will allow me to usher a book into the world under your auspices. A long poem is to me so formidable a task that I fear it will scarcely be completed by next year (it is now indeed hardly begun) —but when finished I shall make a new demand upon your kindness, by submitting it to your criticism and correction.

I am quite ashamed of the length of this letter. A lady's pen, like her tongue, runs at a terrible rate when once set a-going; but I will trespass no longer than to assure you with how much sincerity I am,

My dear Sir, your obliged and grateful,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

[The "long poem," above referred to, was Miss Mitford's work, 'Christina; or, The Maid of the South

* A quarto poem by Miss Holford.

Seas.' It was founded on the romantic incidents which followed the Mutiny of the Bounty, and which had been accidentally brought to light by Capt. Folger's visit to Pitcairn Island in 1808.]

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, BART., *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Sept. 20, 1810.

If I had the presumption to differ from you on the merits of Miss Holford's poem, my dear sir, I completely agree in the justice and discrimination of your critique on 'The Lady of the Lake.' The singular want of invention in the similarity of the two surprises had quite escaped me, though I have read the whole poem aloud three several times; so careless a reader am I! But I have since recollected a still more extraordinary circumstance. The *dénouement* of 'Marmion' and that of 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' both turn on the same discovery. This repetition is wonderful in a man of so much genius, and the more so as the incident is in itself so stale, so like the foolish trick of a pantomime, that to have used it once was once too often.

I quite agree with you in your admiration of Miss Edgeworth. She and Miss Baillie and Mrs. Opie are three such women as have seldom adorned one age and one country. Of the three, I think I had rather (if such a metamorphosis were possible) resemble Miss Baillie. Yet Mrs. Opie is certainly not the least accomplished of the trio, and Miss Edgeworth has done more good both to the higher and lower world than any writer since the days of Addison. She shoots at "folly as it flies" with the strong bolt of ridicule, and seldom misses her aim. Perhaps you will think that I betray a strange want of taste when I confess that, much as I

admire the polished satire and nice discrimination of character in the 'Tales of Fashionable Life,' I prefer the homely pathos and plain morality of her 'Popular Tales' to any part of her last publication. The story of 'Rosanna' is particularly delightful to me; and that of 'To-morrow' made so deep an impression on my mind, that, if it were possible for any earthly power to reform a procrastinator, I really think that tale would have cured me of my evil habits. I actually rose two mornings a full hour before my usual time after reading it—pray, my dear sir, do not ask me what that hour is. The victims of *ennui* are found all over England, from the peer to the farmer, if the latter is unfortunately rich enough to exempt him from personal labour and pecuniary anxiety. The physicians have already recognised it as a disease; and I expect we shall soon see 'died of ennui' placed in the bills of mortality.

A poor little nabob who lives in Reading lately consulted an eminent medical practitioner on a dizziness which he had contracted by riding in a barouche from Brighton to Rottingdean, on an excursion of pleasure undertaken for the express purpose of driving away "the foul fiend." The doctor's prescription was very rational and very uncommon. "You had much to do in India, Mr. W——?" "Oh, yes. I fagged eight hours a day." "Well, sir, you must either resume your post there, or get employment here, or turn hypochondriac." I have not yet heard his determination; but, poor man, he had just made a fortune, and come home to enjoy it. He is married, too, unluckily; so that there are no hopes of his relieving the tedium of domestic peacefulness by a little female ratiocination. A scolding wife is an infallible recipe. The manœuvrers, thank Heaven! are not quite so numerous; but we have one in our neighbour-

hood who bears so strong a resemblance to Mrs. Beaumont,* that, as the lady is originally from Ireland, half the families in the county suspected that Miss Edgeworth had drawn not from the species but the individual, and that her picture would never have had so much truth and nature had she not both sketched and coloured it from our exquisite "neighbour." She has two most charming daughters, who, though dragged to town every spring; to some watering-place every autumn; and to all the parties, plays, concerts, and balls within twenty miles of their home here, during the rest of the year: still remain in "single blessedness," to the indescribable mortification of their mamma, and to the great discredit of her inimitable talents for plots, schemes, and puffing, match-making, and match-breaking. As she is really a very sensible woman, I wonder she does not begin to suspect that she has taken a wrong method to get these sweet girls well married. Nothing could account for the circumstance of two such very lovely young women having reached the age of twenty without attracting one serious admirer but the circumstance of their being the daughters of a manœuvrer.

My dear papa, I am afraid, led you to expect that I had made a greater progress in 'Christina' than I have really done. It is true that in a fortnight I wrote a thousand lines (such as they are), which, considering that we keep early hours, and that either from habit or caprice I can never write till candlelight, is really very tolerable work. But I am sorry to say, my dear sir, that I have scarcely written a hundred lines since, having been engaged in our annual dissipation of balls and concerts, races and oratorios. Oh, the dear delights of a music meeting! Sitting next to your grocer's wife with

* The heroine of Miss Edgeworth's tale 'Manœuvring.'

a silver cap on her head and a crescent of Dovey's diamonds stuck in the front of it! Jammed in between brewers and bakers, and tailors and corndealers; or dancing among their spruce sons and over-dressed daughters, who either dislocate your arms in turning you round, or tread your toes off in threading the intricacies of right-hand and left! It is well for you that my waning paper saves you from a dissertation on the follies of a country town, and brings this tiresome letter to an end. A tiresome letter has been compared to a tedious visit; but there is this happy difference, that the paper torment may be cut short by throwing it into the fire or out of the window, whilst you could not so well get rid of the writer in that way, both on account of her being rather a weighty concern, and of your well-known politeness.

Adieu, my dear sir! Papa and mamma beg me to present their best respects; and I am ever, with every sentiment of esteem,

Very sincerely yours,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Mount Coffee House.*

Bertram House, Dec. 28, 1810.

To-day brought me a most charming letter from Sir William Elford. A very flattering request of his has, however, put me into some perplexity. He says that he perfectly comprehends the honour I have done him by my description; but that he wishes the insertion of some words to show that we are *friends;* for to be considered the friend of the writer of that poem appears to him a higher honour than any he could derive from the superiority of station implied in my mode of dedication. Is not this kind? He gives a very entertaining account

of Lucien Buonaparte and his family, who are the present lions of Plymouth. He is much pleased with them, but does not mention the beauty of the eldest daughter. It has probably been exaggerated.

All our pets are well. Heaven bless you! I am ever most fondly your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

CHAPTER V.

Letters for 1811.

To Dr. Mitford, 17 *Great Russell Street, Covent Garden.*

Jan. 7, 1811.

If you have not taken the poem to Longman's, I should certainly wish you, my beloved darling, to let Mr. Murray see it. He is reckoned a very liberal man, and a more respectable publisher we cannot have. I do not think Longman will purchase it; so, even if you have taken it there, it is probable Murray may buy it at last.

Did I not guess well respecting Gifford?* It was his quoting an old play that made me think it was he. I have little reason to complain. If he attacked Joanna Baillie, even to be *abused* with her is an honour.

I have written a poetical Dedication to Sir William, but it is detestable. I must try again. What will he say to the 'Quarterly' review?

Ever most fondly your own,

Mary Russell Mitford.

* The reviews had been generally favourable to Miss Mitford's volumes of poems; but there was a severe and hypercritical article against it in the 'Quarterly,' which, though Gifford as editor was responsible for its insertion, was not written by him. It was contributed by the Rev. John Mitford, the rector of Benhall. He was the author of a good deal of forgotten poetry and the editor of Gray's works.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Jan. 7, 1811.

My dear Sir,

I perfectly understood the kind motives which influenced you in wishing the form of my Dedication to be altered. I felt it to be cold, but I knew it to be respectful; and, well aware that you have not the same reasons to be flattered by my friendship that I have to be proud of yours, I sacrificed my own vanity to what I thought would be most agreeable to your inclinations. I have, however, joyfully availed myself of the permission to proclaim you my friend.

We were very much gratified by your interesting account of the illustrious strangers. It is chiefly as brother of the great, bad man who rules the Continent that Lucien would strike me. Anything in the remotest degree connected with Napoleon excites my curiosity, and I wish for nothing so much as to make a tour to France. I have heard of a lady who, when at Naples, ardently wished for a destructive eruption of Mount Vesuvius, that she might enjoy the gratification of viewing the burning lava. My desires are a degree more moderate. I only wish for peace, *coûte qui coûte*, that I may go to Paris and catch a glimpse of Buonaparte.

I cannot give you any news of 'Christina.' We have been wasting time in attempting to get it copied; for alas! my dear Sir William, you are not singular in your remarks upon my hieroglyphics. The most expert expounders of manuscripts fail to decipher them, and we have had some difficulty in finding a clerk (not a learned one) who would undertake the task. At last, a horrible Goth of a Scotchman ventured upon the job; and papa sent down two cantos to be compared and examined. But this copying machine knew as little of

metre, grammar, or orthography as the desk on which he wrote, and his blunders were so incessant and so farcical that it appeared more like a travestie than a copy of my poem. Mamma could not read for laughing, and I could not correct for vexation; so the plan was dropped, and the illegible original goes to Longman's to-day.

Mamma begs to present her best respects.

Ever, my dear Sir,

Very sincerely yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

What a forgetful monkey I am! I began my letter to wish you the compliments of the season, and I have finished it without mentioning them. Many happy years to you, my dear Sir William, and patience to read my letters and inclination to answer them quickly!

To DR. MITFORD, 17 *Great Russell Street.*

Jan. 21, 1811.

Mamma always leaves me to say everything of consequence, and fills up her paper with chit-chat. Mr. Clissold and Thompson Martin came here yesterday, my own darling, and both of them declared that you had allowed Thompson Martin to choose what he would of the pictures, excepting about a dozen which you had named to them; and I really believe they were right, though I did not tell them so. Nothing on earth could be more perfectly civil than they both were; and Martin, to my great pleasure and astonishment, but to the great consternation of Clissold, fixed upon the landscape in the corner of the drawing-room with a great tree and an ass, painted by Corbould, 1803.

It had taken his fancy, he said; and, though less valuable than some of those you offered to him, yet, as he did not mean to sell it, but wanted it for a furniture picture, he should prefer it to any other. I told him I would write you word what he said, and lauded the gods for the man's foolishness. I have heard you say fifty times that the piece was of no consequence; and, indeed, as it is by a living artist of no great repute, it is impossible that it should be of much value. Of course you will let him have it; and I wish you would write to inquire how it should be sent, for I made no arrangement, and want to get it off my hands. . . .

[At this time, by some unexplained extravagance of Dr. Mitford, his wife and daughter at Bertram House were reduced to great distress for want of money. Mrs. Mitford writes to her husband, in a letter the same date as the preceding: "I shall depend on a little supply of cash to-morrow, to settle with Frank and Henry" (servants to be dismissed), "as the few shillings I have left will not more than suffice for letters, and such trifles." She afterwards adds: "As to the cause of our present difficulties, it avails not how they originated. The only question is, how they can be most speedily and effectually put an end to. I ask for no details, which you do not voluntarily choose to make. A forced confidence my whole soul would revolt at; and the pain it would give you to offer it would be far short of what I should suffer in receiving it."]

To Dr. Mitford, 17 *Great Russell Street.*

Feb. 14, 1811.

Sir William Elford's letter, my darling, is, as his always are, full of kindness.

My poor pet was certainly killed by Maria.* The feathers were all strewed about the east window (it was in the drawing-room), and several, with the poor little creature's blood, were found sticking to her mouth. She had eaten every part of the dear bird but one claw. I gave her a good beating, and pulled her ears, and shamed her so that she shook like an aspen leaf the whole evening and would not eat any dinner. But, after all, it was not so much her fault; for the sweet darling certainly got out of his cage; and then, you know, the greyhounds' instinct teaches them to pursue anything in motion. I never grieved so much for anything in my life; but it is of no use to fret. The other love is quite well.

Lord Marmion is as fat as a pig and handsomer than his mother. You never saw anything so much improved. He beat Mr. Body's great Smoaker yesterday going to the post; and the sheep-dog a day or two before. He is as bold as a lion. All the rest are quite well. They want you very much, but not half so much as I do. God bless you!

Ever most fondly yours,

M. R. M.

I want to know what Mr. Coleridge thinks of the third canto, which he has not yet seen, I suppose. This sounds like a bull. When am I to have another proof?

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Feb. 20, 1811.

My dear Sir,

Your very kind letter would not have remained so long unanswered had I not been, first, engaged in an

* A greyhound.

excursion into Hampshire, and then busy with my notes almost the whole time since I received it. . .

I am very happy to learn you mean to visit London in the spring. I hope to go there myself in April or May, but all must depend on my dear mamma's health, which is at present, I grieve to say, in a very delicate state. I hope much from the return of spring; for, in my opinion, warm weather and sunshine are a cure for all ills, mental or bodily. Indeed, I should not have the slightest objection to lead the life of a dormouse and sleep away the whole winter. There never was so atmospherical a being. But my beloved mother is of a very different constitution. She joins with my father in best compliments to you, and good wishes for the success of your farming undertaking. And I am ever,

My dear Sir,

Very sincerely and gratefully yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD.*

Beltram House, March 3, 1811.

The enclosed letter, my dearest love, arrived here this morning. I am happy that the speedy disposal of the pictures will enable you, as I hope it will, to settle this unpleasant affair. Once out of debt and settled in some quiet cottage, we shall all be well and happy again. But it must not be long delayed; for my dear mother must be spared a repetition of such shocks. I have answered Mr. Ogle, and I think you had better call upon him. He is more hurt at your silence than at your nonpayment.

* This letter has no direction to it. We may infer that the Doctor was in prison, as a long subsequent letter from M. St. Quintin speaks of his having advanced money to liberate him at the time his pictures were sold.

Mr. Coleridge* has only taken out what could well be spared from my poem. I wish he had taken more, for what remains is really detestable, always excepting his own beautiful lines. Nothing can equal his kindness.

I hope John Valpy means to leave out the gallows.† Christian's friends, being rather a strange race, might take it for an insult, and think that as the poor man contrived to get out of the world without hanging, I had gibbetted him in effigy at the end of my book. Now, if this fancy should enter any of their noddles, I shall undoubtedly send them to John Valpy and let him fight it out with them. My petticoats shall be no protection to him, I assure him. Tell him this with my kindest regards.

Mamma has but faintly expressed my opinion with regard to Lord Shrewsbury, my beloved darling.‡ I am certain you will never get the land, and I do not much think you will get the money without a lawsuit. . .

God bless you!

Ever and ever most fondly yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

Bertram House, Wednesday morning,
March 14, 1811.

At the same time with your dear letter, my own darling, arrived one from my cousin Mary, who states

* Coleridge returned the proofs, with some alterations, on the 3rd of March.

† The digamma, F, which Valpy used to place either at the beginning or end of the books he printed.

‡ This relates to the purchase of a field of Lord Shrewsbury's, for which, it would seem, that Dr. Mitford, as purchaser, had paid a deposit to the steward, but his lordship hesitated to complete the bargain.

her sister to be better, but represents the family as in a state of tumult and quarrelling difficult to be expressed. Mrs. Guy Mitford has sent her second son to your uncle with volleys of abuse against his daughters. Lady Charles withdrew her annuity, but has sent to say she may draw for it again, upon condition of her living quietly in the Isle of Man. My uncle has written likewise, abusing Lady C. and Mary with his well-known eloquence; and Mary wrote him a letter (I have a copy of it) which fully proves that she possesses in a high degree the talent of scolding, which you lords of the creation are so wicked as to assign exclusively to the gentler sex. All that we have to do is, to hear both sides, and take part with neither. Nothing will ever do any serious good to that jangling family; and, in attempting to benefit them, you would only find yourself involved in their endless quarrels.

Our pets are all well. I had fine fun with them last night. They would jump upon me; and Lucy, who had the bellows in her hand, gave them each a puff. You never saw dogs in such consternation. Maria was half inclined to fight with the wind, but she stepped back two steps for one that she advanced, and at last fairly gave in; but she *retreated*—the rest *ran away;* and Lord Wellington will tell you that there is a great difference.

I met with a great snake yesterday; he frightened me, and I frightened him. The creature got away with incredible swiftness, crying like a young child.

I have just been reading Jeffrey's review of 'Kehama.' I do not think it so severe as you do. If men will write fairy tales they cannot expect to escape being laughed at. The wonder is how the author of 'Madoc' could condescend to throw the enchantment of

his genius upon such a parcel of worse than nursery legends. Jeffrey is mistaken in regard to 'Madoc' being still in the first edition. I have myself seen two, one in quarto and one in octavo. I wonder there are not twenty. Walter Scott has nothing half so fine. Did you see the fling at Miss Holford?

God bless you!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

Bertram House, March 22, 1811.

Your meeting at a coffee-house in the Haymarket with a literary man was indeed, my beloved father, a very strange circumstance. It is a coincidence still more extraordinary that 'Christina' herself originated from your meeting Mr. McClure in the same manner, at the Huntley; and that my despised 'Robert Jeffrey'* was the means of introducing you to both. Whether Cumberland† can do us much good, I know not; but his power of doing mischief is undisputed. I cannot endure either the man or his books, but I should not scruple to show him a little civility for Christina's sake; and I dare say you will not be more squeamish. You may lay it on pretty thick, for the man has a most glorious appetite for flattery. Nothing is too much for him: he has the digestion of an ostrich.

I have had a most delightful letter from that delightful man, Mr. Davenport. He meant to write to you by the same post, and was much pleased with my

* See letter dated July 3, 1810.

† Cumberland was now at an advanced age. His works, illustrated by himself, had obtained some success, but he now confined himself to writing reviews and magazine articles.

grandfather's poems.* He accuses me of gross injustice to the Spaniards.† I shall try to make them amends by writing a poem upon a Spanish subject. Perhaps, though, I may do them more injustice by my friendship than my enmity. I shall write to him when 'Christina' comes out.

Robert Taylor has just come to look over Hogarth, and has put all my bright ideas out of my head. God bless you, my own dearest love!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

P.S. by Mrs. Mitford—"Your letter, though a very pleasant one, is so confined to literature that you do not say a word respecting the sale of the pictures at Robins's, which, you may believe, we are not a little anxious about. You do not mention the name of your new acquaintance."

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Carey Street.*

March 23, 1811.

If one did not know that poets, as well as duller souls, are but mortal men, I should have been surprised at your account of Coleridge, whose writings are all spirit; indeed, I should almost have expected him to resemble the account which Shakespeare's boasting Frenchman gives of his horse, "made up of air and fire; the vulgar elements of earth and water do not enter into his composition." But he writes for the newspapers, I believe, poor man; and *that* may account for the

* Mr. Davenport was editor of the 'Poetical Register,' in which some of Dr. Russell's poems were printed.

† Referring to the line, "The victims of degenerate Spain," in her 'Death of Sir John Moore.'

drossy particles which overpower the purer elements in his "local habitation."

I wish you could see my violets and primroses. I never remember half so many. Maria ran yesterday for twenty minutes after a yellow butterfly, in Mr. Body's meadow. It was the most exquisite display of grace that I ever beheld. The butterfly escaped. God bless you, my own dearest!

Your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

MATERNAL AFFECTION.

AN ODE. MARCH 28, 1811.

Hail, blessed love! thy very care
'Tis bliss to feel, to cause, to share.
There is no other love but springs
From base alloy of earthly things;
But thou art fonder than the flame
Lit at bright eye of witching dame;
And firmer than coy friendship's power,
That rules o'er manhood's golden hour.
Thrice happy love! fair woman's blessing,
The world is hers in thee possessing:
She seeks not then the golden store,
Her treasure thou, she asks no more:
She feels not then the cheerless shade,
Thy every sorrow, self repaid.

Oh! lovely is the mother's smile,
When first within her arms,
Her proud heart beating high, the while
She folds her infant's charms.
What sounds upon her rapt ear fall?
It is her babe's low plaintive call,
The first sad notes of plaintive woe;
But still on her maternal soul
They fall like sunbeams on the snow;
Dissolving at their blest control,
The tears of rapture flow.

Sweet is that sound in Memory's cell,
Can any tone so thrilling dwell?
  Oh yes, there is one other:
'Tis when, with slow and broken speech,
Which mimicry and fondness teach,
  He lisps the name of "Mother."

Even she to whom that hallowed name
Brings houseless poverty and shame,
Turned from the walls that wont to cherish,
Left by the man she loved to perish—
Who sees revenge life's only joy;
  Her only refuge death;
If while such dreams her brain destroy
  She feels her infant's breath,
Oh then how sweetly fond remembrance
  Rushes on her quivering heart;
She sinks subdued in mild repentance,
  And all revengeful thoughts depart.

See yonder lovely widowed one,
  Lamenting o'er her warrior's grave,
His short bright course of glory run,
  Unprofitably brave!
She sits upon the lowly tomb,
No teardrop fills her moody eye,
But every breath seems misery's sigh,
And in the wild and speechless gloom,
Madness seems starting through despair!
She sits—her eyes defiance glare,
Fixed, motionless, but not at rest,
Her pale hands crossed upon her breast,—
With hair unbound, and garment rent,
Herself his living monument!
There, lovely statue, wilt thou stay
Till life and reason fade away?
No! tottering through the churchyard dark,
Half hid by graves and briars rank,

A little cherub form appears;
That form dispels the death-fraught charm,
The mourner folds her in her arm,
And dews her with her tears:
One only form could make those feelings mild,
And bid her strive to live—it was her child.

[On receiving the proofs of 'Christina' they found that the Invocation to Scott had been omitted at the suggestion of Coleridge. A mother's resentment at anything which could endanger her daughter's succes is exhibited in the subjoined letter.]

From MRS. MITFORD.

Bertram House, March 29, 1811.

We are, my beloved husband, grieved to find your finger is not so well as when you last mentioned it. I fear, in your unremitting attentions about dear Chris., you neglect paying proper attention to it, which is very wrong on every account. We are more than astonished at Mr. Coleridge's conduct respecting the Invocation: nothing could have lessened him more in my estimation. That a mean, pitiful spirit of resentment to Mr. Scott should induce him to expunge those stanzas so necessary to the poem, and the want of which must be to every reader of taste so perceptible, exceeds my comprehension. Were the poem mine I would have braved any censure as to what he terms "bad lines," being convinced he would have thought them beautiful had they not contained a compliment to Walter Scott. You know Sir W. Elford highly approved them, and will, I doubt not, be much surprised not to find them in the poem. If our treasure follows my advice, whenever she prints another poem she will suffer no one to correct the press but herself: it will save you infinite trouble, and be eventu-

ally of great advantage to her works. I wish you had shown it to Messrs. Rivington; they would not have submitted to the exclusion of the Invocation, neither would your friend Davenport. It appears very farcical Mr. Coleridge's objecting to receive thanks for his attention, lest it should embroil the dear poetess with the reviewers, and cause her to be classed with the Southey, Wordsworth, &c., gang. If he must assume the privilege of curbing the effusions of her pen, and not suffering her to express her own sentiments of a man of genius, because of their foolish quarrels with him, I am extremely angry, the more so, because the mischief appears past remedy, from the very limited time before the poem must be published. It is certainly a most extraordinary liberty Mr. C. has taken, and will, I hope, be the last he will attempt.

[Miss Mitford took a more calm view of this matter. She writes the following postscript to her mother's letter:—]

It is a great comfort to be pitied a little, my own dear love, and mamma has played her part well. I did not think it had been in her. We seem to have changed characters: she abuses Mr. Coleridge, I defend him, though I must acknowledge I do not think he would have found so many bad lines in the Invocation had not the compliment to Walter Scott grated upon his mind.

My only reason for lamenting the omission is that it makes the poem look (to use a familiar phrase) like a pig with one ear; but it does not at all signify. I would not for the world you had affronted a man to whose kindness we are so highly indebted.

What should I say in the copy to Southey, or is it necessary to say anything? Should we not send one to Sir Joseph Banks

Ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

['Christina' became a very popular poem, particularly in America, where it went through several editions.]

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, April 2, 1811.

I am very glad you liked the lines to Mrs. Taylor; and the more so, because, contrary to my expectation, I have heard nothing from *her;* which is, to say the least, rather oddish. They are so fond of writing notes and so fluent at making fine speeches, that I am quite astonished at this unusual silence.*

I had to-day a very pleasant letter from dear Charlotte, who gives a most amusing account of the interest which the birth of the half-Percy, half-Murray child excited at Alnwick.† No bells were rung in the castle for a month. The servants all wore list shoes, and the Duke resigned his accustomed airings for fear of disturbing the young stranger. In short no child (except the King of Rome) ever excited such a ridiculous commotion as this boy occasioned in both families. Lord

* Whilst we were out yesterday collecting violets, the two Miss Taylors came to express their mother's sense of her obligation to dear Mary for the lines. They left a long message about it with Lucy, very expressive of the delight the whole family had experienced by the honour done them; and they brought us some beautiful sea-kale.—Extract from a letter of Mrs. Mitford, April 7, 1811.

† The son of Lord James Murray, whose wife was Lady Emily Percy. He became Duke of Athole.

Charles Murray goes to Harrow the 20th instant, and the Duke and Duchess talk of coming to town in June, to bring him home; but Charlotte says nothing of accompanying them. He is a very clever boy, and understands, she says (we all know what things the understandings of young lordlngs are), Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. I wonder if he will ever be able to attain the difficult art of writing an English letter, without bad spelling and bad grammar in every page. If he ever does, he will be the first of his illustrious family that has acquired such a proficiency.

God bless you,

Ever most fondly yours,

M. R. M.*

P.S. by Mrs. Mitford.—"I know you were disappointed in the sale of the pictures. But, my love, if we have less wealth than we hoped we shall not have the less affection; these clouds may blow over more happily than we have expected. We must not look for an example from all the ills incident to humanity, and we have many blessings still left us, the greatest of which is that darling child to whom our fondest hopes are directed."

* Extract from the unfinished Poem of 'Blanch of Castile,' sent to Dr. Mitford in a Letter from Mrs. Mitford, dated Bertram House, April 11, 1811.

A PORTRAIT.

Of stature low and fairy size,
Her soul seemed through her form to rise.
Scarce could the sculptor's practised eye
Decide if hers were symmetry;
For ever bounding, twining, dancing,
Like sunbeams on a meadow glancing,

None could proportion trace.
But still her light and frolic round
The charmed eye like magic bound,
And all proclaimed it grace.
Her face with Youth's pale colouring glows—
So softly blent, yet so distinct,
Such brilliant white, such rosy tinct,
The apple blossom shows—
And the pure skin, divinely fair,
Seemed as the sun had spared her ever,
And wintry storms and summer air
Had touched her never.
Her auburn locks with wayward will,
From golden bodkin sever still;
Luxuriant, glossy, unconfined,
The silken ringlets freely wind,
Now on her snowy forehead wave,
Now sport around her fair cheek's dimple,
Which passes like the calm lake's rimple,
Where the young cygnets lave;
Sometimes the ruby lips they kiss,
Where lovely smiles so gaily fly,
As if they lived for nought but bliss,
And ne'er had breathed a sigh;
Sometimes they shade those azure eyes
Whose bright rays through the dark lash beaming,
In their own liquid diamonds gleaming,
Like summer meteors rise;
As if those rays, divinely clear,
Had never glittered through a tear.

To Dr. Mitford, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, April 19, 1811.

This I now send you, my best beloved, will not be even in the same canto with what I transcribed the other day; but as you were pleased with the personal charms of Blanch in the other, this will impress you with an idea of her goodness:—

She saw her castle turrets proud,
  Revolving seasons braving,
And floating like a fairy cloud
  The broad white banner waving.
She saw the lovely scene around,
Rich vale and fertile mead;
So lordly was the ample bound,
  A horseman at his speed
Might slack the deftest courser's pace
Ere half the circle he could trace.
Nor dwelt there in that wide domain
One who believed that Murder's stain
  Had tainted Blanch's soul.
Alphonso plied his arts in vain;
Not one of all the peasant train
  Owned ought but her control.
In cottage bower, in castle hall,
That maiden was beloved of all:
The blind man knew her gentle voice;
It bade his darkened soul rejoice,
  And wooed him on to duty:
He heard, and in that silver sound
His mind a new impression found—
  He seemed to see her beauty.
The deaf man saw her lovely form,
Felt her hands' pressure soft and warm,
  Saw her lips sever;
And fancied strains from her blest tongue—
Strains such as angels might have sung,
And on the fond idea hung
  For ever.
The very children in their play
Would act the warrior's part, and say,
"Oh! soon shall we grow stout and tall,
And thus we'll storm the tyrant's hall
  With courage true and stanch;
Nor rest till within the castle hall
  We place the Lady Blanch:"
Till at the word the grandame sage
Would strive to tame their bootless rage,
And still adown her aged cheek
Unwonted tears a passage seek

And she would make the holy sign,
And call upon the aid Divine
To be a shield and stay to her,
Of all who mourned the comforter:
And she the oft-told tale would tell,
When her last son in battle fell,
How like some blessed saint she came—
Poor maid! 'tis death to name thy name:
  But what are words but air,
Less pure than that heart-breathed sigh
Which for thy life ascends on high,
  The widow's, orphan's prayer!
And the stout peasant o'er his flail
Would muse upon the dismal tale;
And, when a few together meet,
Darkly they hint, and whispering greet.
  But when some wake assembled many,
Then bolder louder murmurings rise,
With visage stern and moody eyes,
  They challenge any
Who dare attaint their lady s fame,
Or stain her pure and spotless name.
One word in Blanch's silver tone,
Alphonso! had thy realm o'erthrown;
One glance from Blanch's azure eye
Had hurled thee from thy dignity;
One sign from Blanch's lily hand
Had made her queen of all thy land.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, Sunday,
May 5, 1811.

If my dear mamma was not dosed *secundum artem* it was not the fault of her physician. I assure you, my dearest, I prescribed for her at once. But my patient was refractory; and, as she has contrived to get well without my doctoring, I have forgiven her both for her contumacy and for that which the medical tribe generally find it most difficult to pardon—her recovery.

I am getting on a little with 'Blanch.' I wrote sixty lines last night, and I think you would like them. It is a very pretty pastoral picture, though I say it that should not say it. If I may judge from the extracts in the Monthly, 'Don Roderick' is a falling off indeed. Scott certainly does not excel in the Spenser stanza. He has been so long accustomed to make the measure bend to him, that he cannot bend to the measure; and a consequence results from it something similar to that in the 'Taming of the Shrew:'—

> "Why, then, thou canst not break her to the lute?
> Why, no; for she hath broke the lute on me!"

Messieurs the reviewers are unanimous in their recommendation of the Spenser stanza: but, I don't know how it is, whenever any one writes in it there is some unaccountable fault—a coldness, a stiffness, or an obscurity which spoils the sale of the work. It is the bow of Ulysses, and I shall leave the attempt to bolder suitors.

God bless you, my dearest! [Poor Marmion is lame in one of his hind legs.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To Dr. Mitford, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, May 9, 1811.

I like John Valpy's subjects very well: they show great poetical taste, though some of them are too common, and some too sentimental. With regard to tales, I am quite of his opinion; they are pleasantest to write and pleasantest to read. I am going to write one to-night on a very interesting fact; and you know that I

have already one on a fictitious subject. Odes are above my flight; they require an eagle's wing. There is nothing in which failure is so obvious and so disgusting. As to sonnets, I hold them in utter abhorrence. I only wrote the one already printed to show that I could master the measure if I chose.

I am thoroughly pleased with the 'Eclectic Review:' it has done me *full* justice, though the comparison between Miss Holford and me is so ambiguous that she may probably claim the palm. I will readily admit that she has more genius; but I am confident that mine is the better poem.

Should not the taking the crops at valuation, or your staying till Michaelmas, be mentioned in the particulars? otherwise the purchaser may think to take things as they stand. And should not the day be altered in the advertisement? I see it continues the twenty-second in the Reading paper. When do you mean it to be?

God bless you, my dearest!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

How sudden Cumberland's death must have been!

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

June 7, 1811.

I need not tell you, my dear love, how delighted I am with Mr. Coleridge's approbation. To be, some time or other, the best English poetess (Miss Baillie is a dramatist, you know,) is the height of my ambition. I will certainly attempt the companion Ode, as soon as I

get the subject. Mrs. Coleridge's impetuosity is, I suppose, a soft word for shrewishness. Mamma, who has so much *esprit de corps* as to believe it impossible for a wife to be in fault, always laid the blame of the separation on Mr. C.; but I was sure he was not in fault, and she begins, I believe, to be of my opinion. Has he a share in the 'Courier?'

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To Dr. Mitford, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, June 23, 1811.

Many thanks, my dearest love, for your kind offer of showing me Carlton House. I have already seen so much of it as to completely satisfy my curiosity; and it would only be putting you to trouble and expense for no purpose. I shall therefore stay at home. You must go, and give an account of it. I endeavoured to persuade mamma to take my place, but she will not. She means to-night to vary the scene a little, by going into Reading to Mrs. Valpy's rout. As I am a very useless person at those parties, and the evening is charming for walking, and as mamma herself sees no reason for my going, she will be so good as to bear my excuses. We sent notes yesterday for our Friday's party to the T——s, the L——s, the McC——s, and the R——s; and the man and wife come from each place. Yet, as they with ourselves will make only eleven, mamma has some thoughts of inviting Mr. S—— and Mrs. C——, as we shall most likely not have another dinner party for some time. I regret that *you* cannot attend Sir Francis Burdett's dinner on Monday; but *I*

do not regret not seeing the raree show. The weather will be, I hope, a little cooler, or the dear Sir Francis will probably suffer from the exertions he will be obliged to make. I think with you respecting the ministry. If they can bribe or flatter that weathercock Lord Sidmouth, and a few more of the same kind, to support them, they will be content to set the talents and the property of the kingdom at defiance. The partridges are in good health, and so are all our other pets. I am more and more charmed with the beautiful ribbon you have sent me. Adieu.

I am ever, with the fondest affection, your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, June 30, 1811.

MY DEAR SIR,

Had not the Fates interposed, in the shape of a printer, my letter of the 25th and your kind favour of the 27th would have crossed on the road. Printers are—I will not say what they are;—but I believe I fare the worse for employing an old friend—or, rather the young son of an old friend, who, having dandled me as an infant, romped with me as a child, and danced with me as a young woman, finds it quite impossible to treat me or my works with the respect due to authorship.

At all events, you will get the book some time this week; and I hope, my dear sir, you will tell me frankly if you think there is a falling-off or improvement in the new pieces—in the lyrical ones, I mean; for the tales are merely to fill pages. I never attempted odes before, and it is certainly a bold attempt. The few

who have succeeded are more terrible than the many who have failed.

Oh, my dear Sir William, you had no need to wish me a farmer, though but for one minute (you had some mercy in your wish), for I know all the variety of plagues (worse than the plagues of Egypt!) that attend that fretting race. What is a thunder shower, tiresome wretch as he is, to settled, set-in, bad weather, with all the hay just fit to carry and spoiling for want of one fine day? Such is our situation; though, thank God, we are just *leaving off business;* and I think papa will not be in a hurry to turn farmer again.

There is no news in this neighbourhood, excepting what we make ourselves by our intended removal; and truly I think our kind friends and acquaintances ought to be infinitely obliged to us for affording them a topic of such inexhaustible fertility. Deaths and marriages are nothing to it. There is, where they go? and why they go? and when they go? and how they go? and who will come? and when? and how? and what are they like? and how many in family? and more questions and answers, and conjectures, than could be uttered in an hour by three female tongues, or than I (though a very quick scribbler) could write in a week. This removal will cause you some additional trouble, my dear Sir William. Will you have the goodness to give house-room to *my dear picture* till we are quite settled, and I can receive, and lodge it with the pleasure and respect which I shall delight in showing it, for its own sake, for yours, and for my own? I have not yet seen it, but every one says it is quite beautiful. By-the-way, there is one other piece of news which I must tell you; and that is, that I am sitting here with whole bones and without bruises; and all this I owe to my

own prudence, or pride, or laziness, I am not sure which. Papa went on Monday to see the raree show in Pall Mall,* and was so much delighted with it, that he came down on Tuesday purposely to take up his darling early Wednesday morning, that she might see it too. Now she had seen Carlton House before, and she was a little ashamed of going so far to see a parcel of gilt plate, and water running in tin tubes, and garlands of roses; and it was giving her dear papa a great deal of trouble, and she would rather stay at home. So she did stay at home; and you may imagine on Thursday morning, when the newspaper came, how much she rejoiced to find herself in a whole skin, and with unrent garments. What a terrible scene it must have been!

A thousand thanks for your kind inquiries respecting my dear mother's health. She is, I am happy to say, quite well, and joins in kindest compliments to you. Adieu, my dear sir! Forgive me this horrible scrawl, and believe me ever,

Your sincere and obliged young friend,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

* A fête given in honour of the birthday of George the Third, and to benefit the British "artists," who were suffering owing to the discontinuance of the court receptions. The Regent, Duke of York, Louis the Eighteenth, and the French royal family were present. "The room at the bottom of the staircase represented a bower with a grotto lined with a profusion of shrubs and flowers. The grand table extended the whole length of the conservatory, and across Carlton House, to the length of two hundred feet. Along its centre a canal of pure water continued flowing from a silver fountain, and its banks were covered with green moss and aquatic flowers."

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Coffee House, St. Martin's Lane.*

Bertram House, Tuesday evening,
July 2, 1811.

"The woman that deliberates is lost." This is one among a thousand of Pope's false and scandalous charges against the sex; in revenge, I suppose, for being so scurvily treated by them. For my own part, deliberation with me always terminates in staying at home and doing nothing; and, as quietness and inaction are the only means of keeping a woman out of mischief, I leave you, my dearest papa, to form your own conclusions. I had written you a letter of joyful acquiescence, and I send it, to let you see how happy I should have been to have come to you; but I have been so wretched all day from thinking that mamma would be offended; and that Mrs. Raggett would be offended; and that I should look so giddy and so careless; that, after fretting myself into a dreadful headache, I have not, though all my things are ready, resolution enough to come to you.

Last night, after I had parted from mamma, and, having despatched John, was drinking my tea quite quietly, I was disturbed by a great contention at the front door. Lucy soon came up to see what was the matter. It was John come back again, and quarrelling with a strange man in a postchaise, who, though he had no ticket, insisted upon seeing the house. It was eight o'clock, and John had no mind to admit him; but Lucy took a peep and insisted upon my looking too. "We must let in this man," quoth Mrs. Hawkins, "he is so handsome." I peeped too. "Good God! it is either my cousin Bertram or his wraith; let him in." It was his wraith, for certainly it

was not he, and yet it looked mightily like flesh and blood, and spoke before it was spoken to, which ghosts and wraiths never do, you know; except, indeed, Mr. Southey's Arvalan. Perhaps it had taken a lesson from that renowned personage. At all events it was a very civil spirit, and its name was Mr. Rawlings, and it lived in Lower Brook Street, No. 56 (I did not ask what churchyard it lives in now); but I am afraid it had kept bad company, for it talked of Lord Rivers and Sir Morris Ximenes. The fact is, this man came last night, and, as John would not admit him, he appealed to me; and I sent Lucy to show him the house; and he came to me again, to say how much he was pleased with it, and to leave his name. I never saw two men so like as he and Bertram Mitford. He had just the same rakish air, but was perfectly well-bred and respectful.

Mrs. Raggett brought with her a certain Miss Lucy; a thousand times more formal, more stupid, and more ugly than her sister Jane. Only think what martyrdom I underwent in entertaining—(I use the common word, though it is a very improper one to apply to her; she never can be entertained; but, till a new language is invented adapted to her species, one must use the old one)—this prim damsel from one o'clock to seven! She is a young old maid, and as much worse than the full-grown animal as owlets are uglier than owls. Hogarth's old maid on a frosty morning is a handsome likeness of her.

Pray do people wear their hands prayer-fashion in a leather muff, with thumbs and five fingers? It must be so, for you never could mean those machines that you sent me for gloves. You fitted them upon the shopman, did you? I really should have thought you

had tried them on upon an elephant. My dear papa, they "hang about me like an old lady's loose gown." I shall certainly bring them up with me and try to change them. The shoes are everything that is elegant, and strong, and comfortable. I will never have any others. What a sheet full of nonsense this is! I will buy my pardon by telling you good news:—Marmion is much better.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,
M. R. MITFORD.*

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

Bertram House, Thursday,
July 5, 1811.

The distressing intelligence conveyed in your letter, my best-beloved darling, was not totally unexpected. From the unpleasant reports respecting your affairs I was prepared to fear it. When did a ruined man (and the belief is as bad as the reality) ever get half the value of the property which he is obliged to sell? Would that Monck had bought this place last autumn! At present the best we can do seems to me to be, to relinquish the purchase of Lord Shrewsbury's land, and (if it will be sufficient to clear us, mortgage and all) to sell all we have out of the funds, and with that, and Lord Bolton's legacy, and the money in Lord Shrewsbury's hands, and the sale of the books and furniture, clear off our debts and endeavour to let this house. If this can be done, and we can get from three to four hundred a year for it, we may live very comfortably; not in a public place, indeed, but in a Welsh or Cumberland cottage, or in

* The journey to town, mentioned in this letter, never took place. Some great pecuniary difficulty arose, to which allusion is made in the following letter, and which effectually expelled all thought of present pleasure.

small London lodgings. Where is the place in which, whilst we are all spared to each other, we should not be happy? For the sale of the money in the funds, or rather for Dr. Harness's consent to it, I think I can be answerable. It will not, four years hence, be worth a guinea, and it would now nearly clear the mortgage, and we should retain our only *real* property. If the thousand pounds of Lord Bolton, the six hundred of Lord Shrewsbury, the three hundred at Overton, and the sale of stock, books, crops, and furniture will clear all the other debts, this may still be done. If not, we must take what we can get and confine ourselves to still humbler hopes and expectations. This scheme is the result of my deliberations. Tell me if you approve of it, and tell me, I implore you, my most beloved father, the full extent of your embarrassments. This is no time for false delicacy on either side. I dread no evil but suspense. I hope you know me well enough to be assured that, if I cannot relieve your sufferings, both pecuniary and mental, I will at least never add to them. Whatever those embarrassments may be, of one thing I am certain, that the world does not contain so proud, so happy, or so fond a daughter. I would not exchange my father, even though we toiled together for our daily bread, for any man on earth, though he could pour all the gold of Peru into my lap. Whilst we are together, we never can be wretched; and when all our debts are paid, we shall be happy.

God bless you, my dearest and most beloved father! Pray take care of yourself, and do not give way to depression. I wish I had you here to comfort you. Adieu, my darling!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To Dr. Mitford, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

Bertram House, Sunday morning,
July 8, 1811.

Ah! my most beloved ittey boy, where could mammy's* head have been when she wrote one word that could by possibility vex him whom she loves better than all the world? As to her heart, half of it is in his keeping, and the other half thought to comfort that one. Oh, how I long to see you, to pet you, and love you, and tell you pretty stories of 'Marmion,' and show you pretty glowworms, and talk about Mia and her ittey ones. Poor Mia! I have not heard of her yet, and meant to have sent John to Wokingham to-night; but now I shall wait and go and meet my own boy there on Tuesday and bring him home. Will not that be nice, my darling? My own beloved darling, granny did misuse me sadly (but not my boy—he never does); but poor granny thought I understood she would stay till Friday, and did not write for fear I should call her extravagant. She is come home, looking quite well. Mrs. Raggett brought Lucy again, to the great chagrin of the other two poor girls, and I amused her as well as I could. She mends upon acquaintance. I rather think she was afraid of me at first (this seems wonderful enough, to be sure), and after a time, finding what a King Log I was, the poor frog ventured to approach, and grew quite familiar, and liked me. And I should have liked her very much

* *Mammy.* She means herself, and alludes to her last letter. There is here a strange coincidence between a fact of nature and a fiction of Charles Dickens. Miss Mitford speaks of her extravagant father, to whom she was sacrificing everything, and whom she eventually supported, as her little boy, exactly as the dolls' milliner, in 'Our Mutual Friend,' speaks of herself as the mother of the reprobate father for whom she slaved, and who lived and preyed on her.

if she had been a little less ugly. By-the-way, my simile above is more applicable than you will imagine, for she is just of the frog complexion.

I had to-day a long letter from Mary.* They never received the packet which was sent to the Secretary of State's office, and were very uneasy at our silence. What can have become of it? Mary is quite full of Bocking news, and is setting her cap at Mr. W—— and his four thousand a year. She says she has *two-and-thirty rivals!* I have written to her by this day's post to say that mamma will write in a few days, and that she shall get my book either Tuesday or Wednesday. Pray let it be sent to her, poor girl.

The very mention of my book makes my fingers tingle with a desire to box John Valpy's ears. In the Reading paper the advertisement of my poems is tacked on to the 'Classical Journal,' with "considerable alterations" again, and not a word about additions.

Ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

Bertram House, Friday,
July 12, 1811.

Oh, how disappointed I am not to see you! and not to see Mia! and not to see Mia's dear puppies! And then if you should send for me to meet you to-morrow, it is a hundred to one if I can get the gig. Oh, how disappointed I am! Your not seeing Southey is nothing to it.

The Mrs. Radcliffe has been dead some years. She died, poor woman, quite mad.† It must have been

* Mary Mitford, of Morpeth, her cousin.

† This was a general error, of which the public were only disabused on the publication of her last romance, with Mr. Serjeant Talfourd's

another scribbler of that name, whom you saw receiving money. I wish to heaven anybody would give me some! If I get none for 'Blanch,' I shall give up the trade in despair. I must write 'Blanch'—at least, begin to write it—soon. I wish you could beg, borrow, or steal (anything but buy) Southey's 'Chronicle of the Cid,' and bring it down for me.

God bless you! Ever and ever most fondly and most faithfully your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

John Valpy is quite entirely a fool! To think of offering us three copies of my book! I really do think that I should have thrown them at his head, and taken my chance of his bringing an action against me.

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

August —, 1811.

I cannot dismiss my own 'gitimate son and air so cavalierly; and I want to tell him how well I get on with 'Blanch.' I have now seven hundred lines written; and if I could get books (with which Rivington's people ought to furnish us) I should have no fear of not being able to stuff into six cantos the eventful story which I have framed. Can you sound any of the booksellers respecting it? I can promise that it shall be a far superior poem to 'Christina;' and I think I can finish it by November. We ought to get something by it. It will have the advantage of a very interesting story, and a much greater variety of

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memoir of her. She never was insane for a moment, and lived to February, 1823.

incident and character. I only hope it may be productive.

Most fondly and faithfully yours,
M. R. M.

To Dr. Mitford, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

August 8, 1811.

Mamma says the great art of letter-writing is to construct an epistle without one possible subject. And truly, if such be the fact, no two people have a better opportunity of improving in this way than those who have the honour of sending you a sheet full of nothings. Indeed, my dearest love, upon a careful revision of our letters, I do not suppose that upon an average they would be found to contain one piece of intelligence a week; unless, indeed, you may call it news to hear that our *ci-devant* dairymaid Harriet, who has now the honour of assisting in Mrs. Curtis's seminary for young ladies, is reported to have consented, at the request of her admirer, William, to leave her place at Michaelmas in order to share his fate and Mrs. Adams's cottage. God help them, poor fools; what will become of them! Two such dawdles never existed.

Marmion is more beautiful than ever. He will certainly win the cup at Ilsley this year. I hope you mean to run him, my pet. He has an hereditary claim to it.

Fanny Rowden cannot mean to assert that all who have breathed the air of 22, Hans Place, must be female Solomons! If she does, Heaven help her! Don Quixote, when he took the fair nymph of the inn for the daughter of the Governor of the Castle, did not make a greater mistake. I am very anxious to see the

'Triumphs of Religion.' Miss Cope has reaped a golden harvest; but I am much mistaken if 'Suicide' be equally successful. Those sort of begging experiments never answer above once.

Mammy and all the pets desire their love. They are all well.

Ever and ever,

Most fondly and faithfully your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

Bertram House, August 11, 1811.

To-day has been quite a day of triumph for me, my darling! First, to have such a packet from Mr. Turner;* and last, not least, to have a fine course after a rabbit with our dear Marmion, and to bring home the said rabbit in triumph—another proof of the prowess of our dear lord. You cannot conceive what favour he is in with mamma. She has even forgiven his being a greyhound and a romp, in favour of his usefulness, and has just admitted him herself into the drawing-room. I must not forget to say that Jig put the rabbit out in great style. It was a wonderful kill.

Will you, my dearest, either bespeak, or procure for me from dear Mr. St. Quintin a dozen closely-ruled books, such as we used to have for our exercises. And pray try to get me (without buying) some books about Spain, and an account of the Alhambra, the great Moorish palace in Granada. I am getting on very well with 'Blanch,' and shall have a thousand lines to read to

* Who this Mr. Turner was it is impossible to ascertain; he began his correspondence with Miss Mitford as an unknown admirer of her poems.

you on your return. Is not this being very industrious?

How sorry I am to hear of dear Mr. Coleridge's illness. I hope he won't die. Mr. Turner is certainly a man of high connections, and I have great hopes that he is an old bachelor. How should you like him for a son-in-law? Entering into a correspondence is a very good chance for me, you know. God bless you!

Ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 18, 1811.

I was from former experience, my dear sir, almost certain that your silence was accidental, though the precise cause I could not determine.

I must caution you against expecting the poem to be even so good as the specimen. It will be nothing less than brilliant. That poor little sylph-like thing is destined to go through almost every misfortune that can be named. Pandora's box is opened upon her; and to illustrate the true feminine courage of patient endurance in an interesting and pathetic tale, is the whole object of my poem. This is strongly contrasted with the joyous brilliancy of her station and person. The truth is, that I am fond of that species of moral antithesis (if I may use the expression) which results from contrast of situation and of feeling and of external nature, with the beings who inhabit it. You will find a great deal of this in 'Blanch;' but, woe is me! 'Blanch' is to consist of five thousand lines, and only eleven hundred are yet written!

Have you read 'Self-Control?' You do read novels sometimes; so I may venture to ask the question without offending against the dignity of your sex. I wrote lately to a fair cousin of mine in Scotland, and asked her the same question. She could not give her own sentiments, but she wrote me a most curious account of a dispute, which Miss Wilson's much-talked-of book had occasioned between two gentlemen, one of whom said it ought to be burnt by the common hangman, and the other that it ought to be written in letters of gold. What a high opinion would this have given me of the work, if I had not read it! Having read it, my sentiments accord with neither. I would only send it to the pastrycook and the trunkmaker—am I not merciful? My fair correspondent tells me that the good folks in Edinburgh prefer 'Don Roderick' to any of Walter Scott's former productions. I think it is not very presumptuous to prophesy that this extraordinary preference will not extend southward. There never was a greater falling-off. It is not only more careless and incorrect than his former poems (and they, Heaven knows! were careless enough) but it wants the glow, the spirit, the power over the imagination and the heart, which, with all his faults, Mr. Scott certainly possesses in an eminent degree. Even the metre is defective in sweetness, and sometimes in dignity.

Have you seen Miss Seward's Letters? The names of her correspondents are tempting, but, alas! though addressed to all the eminent literati of the last half-century, all the epistles bear the signature of Anna Seward. To tell you the truth, I was always a little shocked at the sort of reputation she bore in poetry. Sometimes affected, sometimes *fade*, sometimes pedantic, and sometimes tinselly, none of her works were ever

simple, graceful, or natural; and I never heard her praised but I fancied the commendation would end in, "It is very well—for a woman!" What I have seen of her letters confirms me in this idea. They are affected, sentimental, and lackadaisical to the highest degree; and her taste is even worse than her execution. She, Anna Seward, sees nothing to admire in Cowper's letters!—in letters (the playful ones, of course, I mean) which would have immortalized him, had 'The Task' never been written, and which (much as I admire the playful wit of the two illustrious namesakes, Lady M. W. and Mrs. Montagu) are, in my opinion, the only perfect specimens of epistolary composition in the English language. They are, in short, what the letters of Madame de Sevigné are in French. You must know, my dear sir, that I have a theory respecting letter-writing, though, like most theorists, my practice differs most unhappily from my principles. "*Rien n'est beau que le vrai; le vrai seul est aimable,*" is my motto; and translating "*le vrai,*" rather according to the spirit than the letter, by "the natural," I believe that you will agree with me. According to my theory, letters should assimilate to the higher style of conversation, without the snip-snap of fashionable dialogue, and with more of the simple transcripts of natural feeling than the usage of good society would authorize. Playfulness is preferable to wit, and grace infinitely more desirable than precision. A little egotism, too, must be admitted; without it, a letter would stiffen into a treatise, and a billet assume "the form and pressure" of an essay.

I have often thought a fictitious correspondence (not a novel, observe) between two ladies or gentlemen, consisting of a little character, a little description, a little

narrative, a little criticism, a very little sentiment and a great deal of playfulness, would be a very pleasing and attractive work: "A very good article, sir" (to use the booksellers' language); "one that would go off rapidly—pretty light summer reading for the watering-places and the circulating libraries." If I had the slightest idea that I could induce you to undertake such a work by coaxing, by teasing, or by scolding (and in naming these I have almost exhausted the whole female artillery), you should have no quarter from me till you had promised or produced it. In the meanwhile it is time that I should release you from this farrago of nonsense and criticism, and I will at least conclude with that which must always be '*le vrai*,' by assuring my own kind friend with how much sincerity I am ever,

His obliged and affectionate,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

The time and place of our removal is not yet settled, as the house is not disposed of. I hope it will be to London, and that I shall see you there next spring.

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

August 29, 1811.

Is not Sir William a dear, dear delight, my darling? He has misunderstood me as to the letters, as I shall tell him; but what a pet he is![*] 'Blanch' is killed; and, though I say it that should not say it, her death is

* This letter enclosed one from Sir W. Elford, which gives his opinion on several volumes of letters, and refers to the landscape that he had painted for Miss Mitford.

a very pathetic scene; the best I ever wrote in my life. That poem is indeed pathetic, and nothing else. I hope Mr. Coleridge will like it. I dare say I shall be quite at leisure for the tragedy by the time he sends me the plan. I have only two cantos and the beginning of the third more to write; but I am sadly at a loss for the description of a tournament for the first canto. I think it would be better to mention 'Blanch' to Mr. Coleridge, for fear he should have left town before it is finished, and we not know where to send it to him. I am very glad I happened to have a copy of the grammar—far the best, undoubtedly, of all dear Mr. St. Quintin's excellent school-books. Give my kindest love to them all. God bless you!

Ever and ever most fondly yours,
M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 29, 1811.

What a delightful genius you have for scolding, my dear sir, when you can contrive to make even your reproaches almost as flattering as your praise!

I suspect that, from some awkwardness in the construction of the passage, or still more probably from my unfortunate handwriting, you have misunderstood my meaning with regard to the volume of letters. No; my dear Sir William, I did not mean you to be one in a concert, or even in a duet: I intended you for the sole performance. Did you never hear Madam Pion "discourse most excellent music" on two harps at one time? In the same manner I wished you to undertake in your own private person a fictitious correspondence, written with a view to publication, but as nearly as possible like

your common letters: and I was bold enough to send you my idea of the principal ingredients I thought necessary. Do not for an instant imagine that I meant to entrap you into playing a part in a duet with so unequal a performer as myself.

With regard to correspondents, I have been lately teased by the ridiculous practice of one of mine. A friend, to whom I have long been in the habit of writing very frequently, had a most whimsical trick of sending my careless letters round to half her acquaintance—much in the same way as the county newspaper visits in rotation every house in a country village where the inhabitants have any pretensions to learning, from the proud mistress of a regiment of ragged scholars to the humble fabricator of tarts and gingerbread. In this manner travelled my unlucky epistles; and I, quite unsuspicious, wrote on as carelessly as ever, till at length one of my letters, written to Miss R—— in London, actually returned to me here, by the hands of a mutual friend to whom she had lent it. I laughed and scolded, and scolded and laughed; but my business was to think of a remedy—and as "necessity is the mother of invention" (*vide* Don Quixote) I at length devised one. This little traitress is, be it known to you, a starched maiden "verging on the desperation of six-and-thirty," the veriest prude in existence, and as tenacious of her charms as if she lived in the midst of a whole nation of Lovelaces, and a lady could not stir without the risk of an *enlevement*. It is very odd that this tenacity always comes just as the beauty it is meant to defend is vanishing. To return to my tale: This enchantress has, or had, a suitor, a young Irishman, six feet high, and bold enough to carry any fortress to which he might lay siege—except an old maid. A widow would have promised again "to love

honour, and obey" in half the time; but my fair friend is as yet obdurate. The Irishman cannot bend her to his purpose; but I make him serve mine. In every epistle, just between the second and third page, so that she cannot divide them, I rally her upon her Hibernian admirer.

You see, my dear Sir William, I am willing to give you the benefit of *my experience;* and take it from me, that, if ever you want a secret kept not after a woman's fashion, you can have no better way than to blend and amalgamate it with a secret belonging to your correspondent. I am afraid that this maxim is rather à la Rochefoucault, but I am not one of those who think every man a knave because he is not a fool.

The farther you proceed with Cowper's letters the better I am sure you will like them. The third volume is far the best. They have, to me at least, all the properties of grace; a charm now here, now there; a witchery rather felt in its effect than perceived in its cause. The attraction of Horace Walpole's letters is very different, though almost equally strong. The charm which lurks in them is one for which we have no term, and our Gallic neighbours seem to have engrossed both the word and the quality. *Elles sont piquantes* to the highest degree. If you read but a sentence, you feel yourself spellbound till you have read the volume. Horace Walpole had, I believe, a brilliant literary reign in his own day; but he has always appeared to me most unjustly neglected in ours. The 'Castle of Otranto,' though perhaps its highest merit is that it pointed the way to the magician of 'Udolpho,' is yet a work of great interest. The 'Historic Doubts' are highly ingenious. His tragedy,* horrible as it is,

* 'The Mysterious Mother.'

has great strength and power, and his letters are best of all. The fact is, we have so many authors that they succeed one another like the figures in a magic lantern, glitter and pass and are forgotten. "Yes, he is gone, and we are going all," may apply almost as well to the Booksellers' Catalogue as to the Parish Register; and one's only chance is, that, if the rage for brushing up old authors should descend to our posterity, our works may rise like a phœnix from the ashes, under the auspices of some Scott or Gifford of two hundred years hence.

I do not remember what Mr. Hayley says of Pope's Letters in his Introduction, but I quite agree with you in my opinion of their intolerable stiffness and affectation. Sooth to say, Mr. Hayley's smooth, oily pages (as vapid, as tasteless, and as soft as *blanc mange*) always appeared to me, whether in prose or verse, to be exactly of that order which one finds it convenient to read *au bout du doigt.** In vulgar English, I skip them. He had his day, too, poor man! But the wonder with him is, not that he was dethroned, but that he was ever elevated to the high seat of poesy. There are some letters of Hume scattered *par çà par là*, but never, I believe, regularly collected—which are delightfully playful; particularly one to Adam Smith, and inserted in his life, announcing to him the success of his 'Wealth of Nations.' And, amidst the rubbish of Richardson's correspondence, there are four letters of Mr. Klopstock in broken English, which are really enchanting.

Pray, my dear sir, are you clannish? You, who are the head of an ancient family, certainly ought to be so,

* In after-years she reversed this opinion, and became sensible of Hayley's merits.

when I, who am only a branch—a branch, did I say? only a little excrescence upon one wide-spreading tree (much resembling in size and shape and hue those with which the loyal are wont to adorn their hats and their horses on the 29th of May, under the name of oak-apples)—when even I feel so strong a family pride as to be attached to every one who bears the same name. This circle of connections is pretty extensive, as you may judge. Miss Mitford of the Castle is just married, and sixteen couple of cousins (not counting sedate papas and antiquated dowagers) attended the fair bride to a ball about a fortnight since at Newcastle and danced together. How I should have liked to have been amongst them!

As soon as I have finished 'Blanch' to please myself, I have undertaken to write a tragedy to please Mr. Coleridge, whilst my poem goes to him, and to Southey and to Campbell. When it returns from them I shall, if he will permit me, again trouble my best and kindest critic to look over it. This will probably not be for some months, as I have yet two thousand lines to write, and I expect Mr. Coleridge to keep it six weeks at least before he looks at it.

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

[The following is an extract from a letter to Dr. Mitford, New Slaughter's Coffee House, dated August 30, 1811:]

Yesterday evening I devoted to reading over all that I have written of 'Blanch,' and I had the happiness and glory of half blinding mamma and Lucy;

they are really ferret-eyed this morning; but they are so tenderhearted that I am afraid it is not a complete trial of my pathetic powers.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Oct. 15, 1811.

You will be a little surprised, my dear sir, to receive 'Blanch' so soon; you will be still more so to see her in a legible shape.

I am the more willing to send you this unfortunate poem, my dear sir, because I think it is the only chance you will ever have of seeing it. I really believe it is doomed, as, according to your account, many things better worth preserving have been "to add to the blaze of a Christmas fire." Papa, though he would not suffer any one to say so but himself, declares that the very name gives him the vapours. Is not this shocking? Mamma, if I but mention tears, professes herself sick of my affectation—Me! the "poetess of Nature," as the newspapers have it—affected! This is still worse. And a certain *gentille démoiselle* from whom—upon the score of my having been a most patient listener to divers little feminine distresses, such as "lovers lost who never dreamt of love," and suitors gained who little suited my fair heroine—I thought myself entitled to a little commiseration for my literary miseries, suddenly inquired, in the very middle of my first pathetic harangue, where I got the pattern of that sweet morning cap? This was worst of all. Buonaparte's killing question, "*Etes vous légiste?*" could not have shocked Lord Erskine more than this untimely compliment to the outside of my head did me. I never will talk to young ladies about poetry again as long as I live.

Are you a good motto hunter? If you should happen to meet with one that you think appropriate, in French, English, Spanish, or Italian, I shall be very much obliged to you for it; but not in Latin. I do not wish to affect a knowledge I do not possess. I had thought of "Spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues;" but papa, who is a most inveterate punster, says that wicked wits will apply that to the authoress rather than the heroine of the poem, and account for my writing such a sorrowful story upon the charitable supposition of my being a little *touched* in the brain! Even Shakespeare's magic is not proof against the artillery of puns. It is, to be sure, but poetical justice, that he should sometimes fall by a weapon which he so often and so unwisely wielded. Are you not an idolater of Shakespeare? I am sure you must be. I would rather give up all the other books that were ever written, retaining his alone, than sacrifice his and retain all the other works of all other authors. Next to Shakespeare, I like—you would never guess it—next to him, I like '*Les Contes Arabes.*' There's a baby for you!

You will see by the papers that your friend Lucien Buonaparte has offered two thousand pounds to Campbell for a translation of his 'Charlemagne.' I saw the other day a very sensible letter of Mr. Campbell's on the subject. He seems, poor man! to be groaning under the dominion of the booksellers and the necessity of book-making. You know, probably, that he is now writing biographical prefaces to the poets. I cannot conceive how he will manage it, without interfering with Johnson. And he is, of course, tempted by the pecuniary consideration. But his taste and judgment revolt from the task; and he doubts, very reasonably, whether "the neat cantering of a French Pegasus will

suit an English rider." One part of his letter amused me very much; he thinks the story must have got abroad from Millar, who made him the offer, as he (Mr. C.) "only mentioned it to two ladies!" A pretty security for secresy truly!

I do not find that anything very brilliant is expected from 'Charlemagne.' Angels and archangels, and thrones and dominions, are but lumbering kinds of machines, worse by half, I think, than the old Grecian deities, who, if they were nothing else, were at least very amusing. And as to French poetry, it is an absolute nonentity. The French have, to be sure, plenty of fine declaimers in masculine and feminine rhymes; but, except Rousseau and Fénélon, who both wrote in prose, I do not think they have anything resembling a poet in the nation. And even of those two, the first rocked me into a gentle slumber by the soothing lullaby of love-sick sentiment, and the other produced an interrupted doze, a sort of sermon-like feeling, by the monotonous tone of lectures moral and political.* Don't set me down as a ferocious critic. But I admire French prose so warmly, and detest so much all French verse (except the rhymed plays of Molière and the 'Athalie' of Racine), that I have been led into this digression without considering its impertinence.

Adieu! Ever affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

* Miss Mitford refers to Telemachus.

To Dr. Mitford, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

Bertram House, Sunday morning,
Oct. 21, 1811.

I do not know, my dearest love, that I was ever more astonished than I was to hear that Miss Rowden had any thoughts of engaging in so arduous a task as the translation of 'Charlemagne.' If we engage to do it together (to which I have, on certain conditions, no objection), she must take one specific portion, not more than she can to a certainty perform within the given time; and the price must be divided according to the quantity translated by each. I am very sure that she will not produce above one-third (perhaps not more than a quarter) in the time in which I can translate the remainder.

How happy I shall be if our offers are accepted. How came he to refuse Scott? If it was on account of time, I would be bound to have it published (printing as I go on) by next March twelvemonth. This I would do either with or without a coadjutor; and I should be more certain of doing it alone. What am I to do with the intractable name of 'Charlemagne?' It is, I believe, a sort of barbarous Latin for 'Charles the Great;' and so, I think, I shall call him. Ask what Fanny means to do with the name. Perhaps you could ask Mr. Coleridge. I do not see why our names are to be concealed.*

The accompanying verses I have sent to Mr. Turner. You will see that, with my usual economy, I have turned

* In a later letter she writes: "Fanny Rowden means to cheat us if she can. While she is disputing the bone with me, some other dog will come and carry it off." This was the case; the translation of the poem was given to Francis Hodgson, translator of Juvenal, and afterwards Provost of Eton.

my rejected Invocation to good account.* Pray do not show them to dear Mr. Coleridge. How anxious I should have been about 'Blanch' if I had not been engrossed by 'Charlemagne!'

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

TO THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH SEAS:

ON READING SOME VERSES ADDRESSED TO THE AUTHOR, WRITTEN DURING INDISPOSITION, BY JOHN TURNER, ESQ.

Spirit, that o'er the bosom of the deep
Didst guide the brave adventurer's early way
To those fair isles where southern breezes sweep
In murmuring silence o'er thy Cook's Morai;
Spirit that dwellest on the ocean spray,
Rid'st in the wind, and sportest in the beam;
With thee of late young Fancy took her way,
And lingering in the dale or by the stream
Of Pitcairn's Isle, she roved, enamoured of her theme!

Spirit, she wooed thee not to guide the bark
Of Slavery across the peaceful tide,
Where men, who rose free as the matin lark,
Desperate, at eve, plunge o'er the ship's tall side,
Deep in the wave, their chains, their woes, to hide.
She wooed thee not to swell the waning store
Of drooping Commerce shorn of half her pride.
Nor sought she War, fell fiend! whose cannons roar
From Lusitania's plains to Norway's icy shore!

'Twas but to hang across yon towering palm
Her simple lyre; she sought that southern spring
That she might list while in the sea-breeze calm,
Waking the rustic music of its string,
Wild, faint, irregular, the echoes ring.
Hushed is the lay, frail warbling of an hour!
And Fancy, soaring on reluctant wing,
Forsakes the palmy grove, the jasmine bower,
And Friendship's purest bliss, and Love's celestial power.

* Rejected by Coleridge. (See letter dated March 29, 1811.)

Lingering and turning oft, coy Fancy flies
To woo the soft gales of Iberian plains,*
Where Moors and Christians, mosques and convents rise
In visions arabesque or Gothic strains,
As Piety exults or Love complains.
Yet lists she still, as on Pacific seas
Another harp with nobler music reigns,
Flinging its bold notes on the southern breeze,
And swelling loud and deep its stately melodies.

Well might she list! For with the classic lore
Of Ithaca and lovely Arcady,
Came lofty praise of Pitcairn's pleasant shore
And 'twas her strain inspired the minstrelsy!
Spirit! with healing on thy pinions fly,
And breathe soft balm upon the minstrel's head!
So shalt thou list again his harpings high,
When rosy Health shall hover o'er his bed
And Genius his bright dreams and golden visions shed!

M. R. M.

Oct. 21, 1811.

["Blanch" was afterwards sent to Coleridge. "I hope," she writes (Nov. 28), "Coleridge will not have made any annotations, and then we may get Campbell to look over the MS. which would be a very great comfort."

Mrs. Coleridge (see letter dated June 7, 1811) had by this time left her husband, and was residing with her brother-in-law, Southey, in his cottage at Keswick; while Coleridge, who had not published anything since 'The Death of Wallenstein' in 1800, was now engaged in delivering lectures in London on Poetry and *Belles Lettres*.]

* Alluding to 'Blanch of Castile,' which Miss Mitford was then writing.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Dec. 15, 1811.

Your most kind letter followed me to London, where I have been staying for the last ten days. I went thither for a purpose which, I think, was extremely soberminded and praiseworthy; albeit I never mentioned it to any one that did not laugh in my face. I went thither to improve in my vocation (just as country milliners and mantua-makers go to *finish* and learn fashions) by hearing divers lectures—on Milton and Shakespeare, and criticism and poetry, and poets and critics, and whipping little boys, and love and philosophy, and every subject that ever entered the head of man—from my good friend Mr. Coleridge. And here I am returned quite Coleridgified; much in the same way, I suppose, as Boswell was after a visit to Johnson; sprinkling, but not mixing, his brilliancy with my dulness, "like sprigs of embroidery on a ground of linsey-woolsey."

What a simpleton I am to tell you all this! I shall not say a pretty thing to you for these six months, but you will give the credit of it to my dearly-beloved lecturer. I wish you had heard him. You would certainly have been enchanted; for, though his lectures are desultory in the highest degree, and though his pronunciation is an odd mixture of all that is bad in the two worst dialects of England, the Somersetshire and the Westmoreland, with an addition, which I believe to be exclusively his own, namely giving to the *a* long as in "wave" and "bane," a sound exactly resembling that which children make in imitating the bleating of a sheep, 'ba-a-a;" yet in spite of all these defects, he has

so much of the electric power of genius—that power which fixes the attention by rousing at once the fancy and the heart—that the ear has scarcely the wish to condemn that which so strongly delights the intellect.

I must tell you a misadventure which happened to me at one of these lectures. I had set my heart on taking my friend Mrs. Rowden with me. Now, she is about as difficult to draw as a road waggon (not personally, but mentally, I mean), and had no fancy for the expedition; but as she had to do with one quite as obstinate, and a thousand times more enthusiastic than herself, I carried my point, and had the satisfaction of seating her close by my side in the lecture-room. It was very full. The orator was more than usually brilliant; and I had just got Mrs. R. to confess that "he really was tolerable" (a wonderful confession, considering she was *a lady*, and determined to dislike him), when to my utter dismay he began a period as follows: "There are certain poems —or things called poems—which have obtained considerable fame—or that which is called fame—in the world; I mean the Pleasures of Tea-drinking, and the Pleasures of Wine-drinking, and the Pleasures of Love, and the Pleasures of Nonsense, and the Pleasures of Hope." There, thank God, the list ended, for his censure was only aimed at Campbell, whom he proceeded to abuse. But think what I felt while he was going on with his "Pleasures," and I expected the 'Pleasures of Friendship' to come out every moment. Mr. Rogers was just by, so that Mrs. Rowden had the comfort of company in her sensations, whatever they might be; but they had both the wit to keep them to themselves.

I dare say, my dear Sir William, that you know more of town news at Bickham than I did in London,

though I heard plenty of it; but I am sadly troubled with "the malady of not marking." I can only tell you that everybody goes to see some beautiful specimens of French engraving, especially some portraits of the Emperor, of which you may possess yourself at the moderate price of a hundred guineas each; that one is wearied to death with the disputes* respecting Dr. Bell and Mr. Lancaster; and that it is said to be as difficult to get a box to see Mrs. Siddons, as it was to see the young Roscius of notorious memory. However, I contrived to obtain a place, and saw her; and (for the first time in my life) without pleasure, in 'Pizarro.' I had never before seen that disgrace to Kotzebue, to Sheridan, to the stage, and to the audience; and I really think the horses of last year, and the elephants of this, are rational amusements compared to the penance of hearing such rhodomontade from human organs.

Poor Marmion is much obliged to you for your good wishes, and so is his mistress; but, alas! they are unavailing. You must know, my dear sir, that papa contrived to lame him among the nasty Hampshire flints just the week before the Ilsley meeting, and he has just played the same prank with poor Maria. Is not he a very naughty man? Believe me to be always

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

If I had but two inches of paper, then would I tell you of a marriage about to take place in our family; but, alas! I have no frank, and what woman was ever

* On Education.

brief in announcing a wedding? I must, however, squeeze in, that my dear cousin, Charlotte Murray (the prettiest girl in Scotland—if you wish to see her picture look at Scott's 'Lady of the Lake') is going to be married to a General Oswald (do you know him?), and that her uncle, the Duke of Athole, gives five hundred pounds for her wedding-clothes.

CHAPTER VI.

Letters for 1812.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Jan. 5, 1812.

My dear Sir William,

Have you read 'The Countess and Gertrude,' a philosophical novel of much note? I have no patience with it; because, in the first place, it abuses spoilt children, and you and I know that spoilt children are sometimes very innocent little simpletons; in the second, it advises a sort of rigorous discipline during youth, in order to prepare for the misfortunes of age. By-the-way, this is just such an argument as it would have been, before inoculation was practised, to have advised a man to live all his life on panada and water-gruel, for fear he should have the small-pox in an unprepared state; and it would entirely annihilate all the happiness of the only truly happy part of our existence. And is not the sunny felicity of childhood in itself unconscious virtue? Is it not connected with every sweet, and generous, and unselfish feeling? And is it not the parent of that general love, that Scriptural charity, without which there is in this life neither happiness nor virtue?

Did I not puzzle you a little in my last by talking of Mr. Coleridge lecturing upon whipping? The fact is, that he actually began one of his orations by a very eloquent but rather laughable panegyric on the practice of flogging schoolboys, in preference to Mr. Lancaster's method of shaming children by various devices. I am a steady Lancasterian—I always loved "the red, red rose;" and yet it brought forcibly to my recollection a most laughable failure of a punishment of this sort, in which I was a party concerned.

You must know, my dear Sir William (to tell a story of the good old gossiping style), that the mansion where I had the honour to be initiated into the mysteries of grammars, globes, and dictionaries was, like most other mansions of the same sort, kept by a governess and governed by her teachers. Of these, the French *gouvernante* (called in school-girl jargon "madame") was always *la dame dominante;* and when I first left home, I found in that situation a lovely, heartbroken young woman, the daughter of an *emigré* of distinction, worn down by her parents' distresses, and her own inability to alleviate them, and totally unable to contend with the thoughtless levity of twenty gay and unmanageable children. The English assistant was exactly of that character which had rather do a thing than undertake the trouble of seeing that another did it; just the sort of woman who, had she been in the far more enviable post of a nursery-maid, would have nursed a child into the rickets sooner than teach it to walk. She took care to put by everything after us, or to order the servants to do so; all appeared well and orderly in the sight of the governess; and, while the sweet Mad^lle^ La Roche stayed, all was quiet. She was fortunate enough in the short Peace of Amiens to get to France with her father

and mother, and recover part of her paternal possessions; whilst with her unhappy pupils, the dominion of King Log was succeeded by that of King Stork. The "madame" that came was a fine majestic-looking old woman of sixty, but with all the activity of sixteen, and the fidgety neatness of a Dutch woman. Four days passed on in distant murmurs at our untidy habits, and threats of a terrible example to be made of those who left things "*traînantes par la chambre.*" A few exercise books found out of place were thrown into the fire, and a few skipping-ropes (one of which had nearly broken "madame's" neck by her falling over it in the dark) thrown out of the window. But all this was but the gathering of the wind before a storm. It was dancing day. We were all dressed and assembled in the room, when "madame," to our unspeakable consternation, began a thorough rummage all over the house and called us to follow her. Oh! the hats, the tippets, the shoes, the gloves, the books, the music, the playthings and the workthings, that this unlucky search discovered thrown into holes, and corners, and everywhere but where they ought to have been! Well, my dear sir, all this immense quantity of litter was to be fastened to the person and the dress of the unfortunate little urchin to whom it belonged. The task of apportioning it was, indeed, much such an one as a malevolent fairy in one of Madame D'Aunois' Fairy Tales assigned to a captive princess when she brought her the mixed plumages belonging to several different birds, and ordered her to assign every single feather to its proper proprietor. But, alas! poor "madame" did not know the plumage of her little birds, and she had no good genius to assist her in the task; for "*ce n'est pas à moi*" was all she could get from the little

delinquents, and many were the hats that no one would claim, and the gloves that no one would own, and the slippers which, like the famous glass ones, would fit nobody. Plenty, however, remained, which could not be denied, to form a style of decoration more novel than elegant. Dictionaries suspended from the neck *en médaillon*, shawls tied round the waist *en ceinture*, the loose pieces of music pinned to the frock *en queue*, formed but a small part of this adornment. There were few that had not two or three of these elegant appendages, and many had five or six. I escaped the best, from a cause that is pretty general in this world—because, in short, my sins were of the greatest magnitude. One of the maids took care of my clothes, and I took care not to own my garden habiliments. Work I never touched, so I could not leave that about; and as to my music-books, they might have stayed untouched in their places from Midsummer to Christmas had I not been obliged, *malgré moi*, to make use of them. Nothing of this, therefore, was found against me; but in the very middle of the dancing room, just opposite to a large French window, was a table with an old portfolio almost as big as myself, a glass of dirty water, and a plate on which I had been mixing colours. None of these seemed portable. To be sure, if "madame" had been well read in 'Don Quixote' she might have encased me in the portfolio, like Sancho Panza between the bucklers, in the Island of Barataria, or she might have affixed the plate upon my head as the knight did Mambrino's helmet; but this not occurring to her, I escaped with a good lecture and a pocket-handkerchief fastened to my frock, which, as it was quite clean, was scarcely perceptible. All this was meant for the benefit of the French dancing master; but, alas! poor

" madame " was not aware that he was not coming till after supper, and that the intervening hour was devoted to standing upon one leg, like a goose upon a common, or to marching to the right and to the left, under the superintendence of a drill sergeant! The man of war arrived. It is impossible to say whether the professor of marching or the poor Frenchwoman looked most disconcerted. The culprits unfortunately did not mind it at all. At length " madame " began a very voluble oration, intended to express the extent of our delinquency. But, alas! " madame " was again unfortunate. How should a drill-sergeant understand French? She was therefore driven to translate. " It is, sare, *que ces dames*—dat dese miss be *' des traineuses ;'* " but this clear and intelligible sentence producing no other visible effect than a shake of the head, " madame " desired me (who happened to be next her) to tell him what she had said in English, and to tell her who *he* was. Did not my situation resemble that of Pistol's boy when he was ordered to " construe " to M. Le Fer, that his master would " fer, and ferret, and firk him?" I had to find English for " *traineuses,*" and French for drill-sergeant. I, however, got over my difficulties by calling him (by analogy) " *un maître de marche,*" and telling him frankly that we were in disgrace. The man was good-natured, and said we could not possibly walk with all those incumbrances. There could be no difficulty in translating that speech, you know. So the gloves, the shawls, the music-books and the dictionaries were all taken off, and we remained as before, only half-stifled with suppressed laughter. Thus ended this experiment in education, and thus ends my story.

I send you no compliments, my dear sir, not even the compliments of the season, but the best good wishes

of our family circle, and particularly of her who is ever,

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bath.*

Bertram House, Jan. 28, 1812.

I will, my dear Sir William, even at the risk of provoking you to think "good manners a desirable accomplishment," plainly tell you that I believe you to be quite mistaken in thinking that young ladies are generally speaking good correspondents. As to experience, you and I are probably much upon an even footing. You have not, perhaps, had much commerce with them; neither have I.

I have lived so little with girls of my own age, and have been so much accustomed to think papa my pleasantest companion, and mamma my best friend, that, excepting with one dear and lovely cousin who is to me as a sister, and one most beloved friend (Losia Choynowska), from whom I am separated by the living death of immeasurable distance, I have escaped unscathed from all the charming folly and delectable romance of female intimacy and female confidence. I have, however, seen quite enough of the pretty letters of pretty ladies to let you into the whole art and mystery of epistolary trade; and, relying upon you not to expose me as "an owl among the birds," I will, as far as in me lies, try to show you that it is really possible for you to write *passably*, though you have not the good fortune to be a young lady.

The first class of these fair correspondents is much the best. These are the apologising damsels, who write once in three months; whose letters regularly begin with "I m ashamed," and go on with various luminous and

edifying excuses—such as the illness of a lap-dog or a third cousin, or a ball a month back, or a marriage that had been, or was to be, or that ought to have been and was not to be; or a dress worked, or a trimming painted for the said marriage—and so you are fairly set down in the middle of the second page; and just as the real letter is begun (for surely these preliminary excuses are no part of a letter), the postman calls, or the dinner-bell rings, and the disconsolate fair one, who meant (yes, she certainly did mean it, for she tells you so) to have written you a full sheet, is obliged to "tear herself away with scarcely time to sign herself your affectionate friend." Peace be to them, sweet simpletons! as unmeaning, as unvaried, and, thank Heaven! as brief as their own dinner-bells.

My next set consists of two apparently opposite classes. The ladies in "issimo"—the setters up and the pullers down—those to whom all is best, or those to whom all is worst; agreeing in nothing, excepting in discharging upon their correspondents the full glittering fountain of their happiness, or the swollen muddy cascade of their discontent. The first sort cannot go upon a water-party but you must read an account of it in three full sheets. All the dresses of all the ladies—all the speeches of all the gentlemen—and all the songs sung by the whole party—are the first described, the second detailed, and the third copied for your amusement. While every tree and hill, and stream and flower, and weed and leaf, and the sun, moon, and stars, and even the wind, and the clouds, come in for a share of description or apostrophe; though, indeed, as Nature is much less to their taste than art, these glorious objects generally escape with much less notice than the colour of a pendant or the shape of a saltcellar. The complainers

are quite as tiresome, and certainly more distressing. If they tell you of a journey, you must expect to hear of "moving accidents by flood and field." The weather is always bad; if there be but a cloud as big as a pin's head, it descends in the form of a shower the moment they have opened their carriage. They are always overset in the dirtiest ways, and benighted in the most dangerous places; their horses are always restive and their postilions always drunken. The inns are dirty, the chambermaid awkward, and the sheets damp; and all these evils fall with an unpitying hand on the devoted heads of their correspondents.

But this is nothing to your sentimentalist. We may have some pity for evils which, exaggerated as they are, are yet real and tangible. But for the soft distresses of a gentle damsel who is afraid that another dear bosom friend (for these pretty creatures, who cannot live without a sister soul, generally manage to have a *corps de réserve*, in case of loss by death, or marriage, or quarrels, or rivalry, or any other unhappy accident) has looked coldly upon her, or has neglected to return a pressure of the hand, or has suffered twenty-four hours to pass without answering her last note, or has committed some other *crime de lèse majesté* against the "inviolable sanctity of their never-ending friendship," and begs your advice and assistance in so dreadful a dilemma—

> "To laugh were want of goodness and of grace,
> But to be grave exceeds all power of face."

One class more, and I have done. I mean your learned young ladies—pedants in petticoats—who are crammed from their infancy with languages, arts and sciences, much in the same way that my good old nurse used to stuff bran into a pincushion. These *gentilles démoiselles* are

the most perplexing of all. They mean to astonish, and they generally succeed. You cannot read their letters without a lexicon, nor understand them without an encyclopædia. As to their subjects, they reach from earth to heaven; it is impossible to reckon them. They will write you a dissertation on the comet, or an explanation of the Portland vase—a *catalogue raisonée* of the British Museum, or a true account of the now extinct animals who sailed with Noah in the ark. But for the most part they talk of gases and galvanism, of columns and pilasters, and pistils and corolla; quote Hebrew, and tell you they are just going to learn hydrostatics.

I so hate, myself, to have deductions and morals forced down my throat, that I make it a point of conscience not to torment you with them. I must, however, observe that in this educating age everything is taught to women except that which is perhaps worth all the rest—the power and the habit of thinking. Do not misunderstand me. I would not turn women into statesmen or philosophers. It is the privilege of man to govern, and the happiness of woman to obey. I would only wish that, while everything is invented and inculcated that can serve to amuse, to occupy, or adorn youth—youth which needs so little amusement or ornament!—something should be instilled that may add pleasure and respectability to age. That bad letters of every kind arise from want of the habit of thinking, I cannot doubt. There is, too, a yet deeper evil: the little thought that is permitted, is directed to very wrong objects—to dress and to matrimony—both as a means and an end. They dress to marry and marry to dress; and so dressing and so marrying, there are, I fear, but small chances that they will make good wives or good letter-writers.

Pray, my dear Sir William, have you ever had occasion to see a great boaster thoroughly humbled? "And, pray, my dear madam, why do you ask me?" will be your reply. Read and you will know. A little fat damsel, with whom you are sufficiently acquainted to say—no! I cry you mercy!—to *write* very pretty things to, was till within this fortnight a very great braggart. She knew, it is true, that she was much subject to moral fear; that to be introduced to one whom she greatly admired always gave her an ague fit; and that to enter a drawing-room full of company, unless she could creep in behind her mamma, was worse than going into a shower-bath—but then she thought to herself (and sometimes I am afraid she said), "This is not personal fear—this is shyness, not cowardice; and in personal danger I have no doubt but I should have sufficient resolution!"

Was not this sad boasting? Though, to do the poor girl justice, she had some reason for thinking herself a heroine; she never started or screamed at spiders, frogs, snakes, or oxen; she never either felt or expressed any fears of being overset in a carriage or robbed upon Hounslow Heath. She had once been stranded in a man-of-war's boat on a sandbank off St. Helen's, and had been obliged to wait the return of the tide without a possibility of either getting off to sea or making land, and in the midst of scolding, sighing, crying, squalling, and sobbing, she had felt neither pain nor fear, except of hunger; and *pour comble de courage*, she had actually slept in an old castle in Northumberland which had once had the reputation of being haunted, and neither dreamt of spectres nor lay awake expecting a ghost to pull back the curtains. Had she not a right to think herself brave till she was proved a coward?

Now to my story. One night, about a fortnight ago, this damsel was writing, as she often does, about half-past eleven. Her mamma was reading; the men-servants were gone to bed; and two silly maids remained up frightening one another about robberies and murders. All of a sudden a great noise was heard at the backdoor —a noise of shouting, knocking, and bouncing; and the silly maids, instead of answering to the loud and repeated demands for entrance, ran up stairs to their mistresses to assure them that they were certainly going to be robbed and murdered. What effect this comfortable intelligence might have had I know not.

All the passions are contagious, and none, perhaps, so catching as fear. But do not think that their report would have alarmed the subject (I wish I could say the heroine) of my tale, had it not been accompanied by a most fearful repetition of the shouting, knocking, and bouncing at the *front* door! This was really terrible. One maiden volunteered to put her head half out of the study door, which was open, to listen; and she declared there was a whole army of them, all "men in buckram and men in Kendal green, and it was so dark you could not see the back of your hand." The mamma was not at all frightened, but the daughter followed the other damsels up the back-stairs to call up their natural defenders, the men; and there she stood midway, leaning upon the bannisters and listening to a repetition of fearful dreams and bloody omens—till she was reinforced by one valiant man, and roused to some exertion by hearing that the other, "a great lubberly boy" of seventeen, had declared that if he must die, he certainly would die in his bed.

You cannot think how much good the being obliged to scream and scold him through the door did her;

and whether the eloquence of fear or the being fairly dragged out of bed by one of the frightened maids prevailed, he certainly did get up, and the whole cavalcade—much cheered by finding that as the knocking still continued, and the courageous man-servant had proceeded with a gun to the post of danger, they at least should not die unavenged—prepared to descend. It was truly edifying to observe the respect of the servants and the humility of the young lady; they would not for the world go before her; and she condescended to walk down the back-stairs. By the time they had got half-way down—for the procession moved with dignified slowness and solemnity—they heard sounds extremely different from those which had alarmed them; sounds which could not be mistaken, for they were those of mirth and laughter. And the terrible robbers and murderers, "the men in buckram" and the "men in Kendal green,' proved to be one poor solitary messenger, who had brought a parcel from the Reading coach office, and, having been called out of his bed and lost his way, had fancied the family must be in bed and asleep too, and that he and his horse had nothing for it but to make as much noise as would, I think, have awakened the seven sleepers.

I must not, however, make the worst of a bad story. Your little friend neither sobbed, nor wept, nor fainted: she only trembled a little and lost her colour for the first time of her life; and she recovered so soon, that she was able to correct a very incorrect proof of a certain 'Ode to Genius,'* which the messenger brought and took back again, and to write to her dear papa, and even to finish the intricate machinery of a Spenser stanza, in

* Published in the 'Poetical Register.'

which she was engaged when the alarm began, before she went to bed. Apropos of the 'Ode to Genius,' I am delighted that you like it, not only because I am always proud of your approbation, but because—it looks very vain to say so, but as it is the first time that it has happened with anything that I have written—I really like it myself. And I hear that it is much spoken of in London.

I most sincerely hope that we shall meet this spring in London, where we should have been long ago had not the purchaser of this place been a righteous, canting, cheating London upholsterer, who, having already three houses, found out after buying this that it was one too many, and has been trying to get rid of a bargain much too advantageous to him, by starting frivolous objections against a title which is, I believe, as clear as anything can be which has been handled by lawyers. This it is which has occasioned a delay extremely inconvenient, as we had packed up most of our things, dismissed several of our servants, and have been for the last five months ready to set out at a week's warning. I now hope that things are coming to a crisis, and that by April or May we shall have the pleasure of renewing (I might almost say commencing) our personal acquaintance. You will find just the same plain, awkward, blushing thing whom you profess to remember; only I think the almost hermit life that I have led for the last year has rather improved all these enchanting qualifications. I talk to you with wonderful boldness upon paper, and while we are seventy miles distant; but I doubt whether I shall say three sentences to you when we meet, because the ghosts of all my impertinent letters will stare me in the face the moment I see you. Where I got all this bashfulness, Heaven only knows! Papa, indeed, says I in-

herit it from *him.* He is now in town. Mamma desires me to give her best respects, and I beg you to believe me,

Very sincerely and affectionately yours,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bath.*

Bertram House, March 10, 1812.

Every man, and especially every man of genius, has some great and singular object which he resolves to accomplish. I lately read of an eminent mathematician and philosopher, Mr. Fransham, of Norwich, who determined that his grand exploit should be to catch the ball 666,666 times upon the spiked end of an ivory cup and ball. By-the-way, the biographer has rendered this ridiculous circumstance a thousand times more laughable by very seriously disputing whether the right name of this common toy be "Bilver-catch," or "Bilboa-catch;" and at last determining that, according to etymology, it ought to be "Bilboa-catch," as that town claims the honour of its invention.

Now it is my opinion, my dear Sir William, that you, from some extraordinary coincidence, have fixed upon an object which, while it yields in labour to the spinning and tossing amusement of the aforesaid philosopher, infinitely exceeds it in ingenuity. You have, I really believe, determined to try with how many varied and graceful excuses you can begin your letters; and, while your apologies continue to be better worth receiving than other people's letters, I shall find it absolutely impossible to quarrel with you for your delinquency. How much I thank you for your excellent story of the Shower Bath, and how much more I thank you for confiding sufficiently in me to leave a part untold. There is

nothing I detest so much as those books, and *à plus forte raison* those persons, who insist upon telling you everything—who labour every point, as the lawyers say, as if they thought all excellence consisted in length, and

"Talk about it, goddess, and about it,"

till, instead of laughing at their story or being edified by their argument, you are too tired even to enjoy the slender consolation of laughing at them. This is my chief objection to those pretty moral hot-pressed and cream-coloured books of the Essay and Dissertation genera which are so often selected by godpapas and godmammas and uncles and aunts, as cheap and suitable presents for young ladies.

You are not a courser, O man without taste! or you should hear how I stood upon a hill in Oxfordshire last week and saw about twenty courses, in which the hares were so civil as to come almost close enough to throw me down, and in many of which both the hare and the dogs might have been covered by a sheet. And you should have heard, too, of my triumph in a little Northumberland greyhound of papa's, who had just arrived on the top of a coach from a collier, beating one of Lord Rivers's famous dogs, and making the old Oxfordshire coursers, who expected, I believe, that she would never have been able to run twenty yards, bow to the superior blood and spirit of my dear little Lufra of the North Countrie. All this you have lost because you are no courser.

Did I tell you that you will not see 'Blanch' in print this year? Lord Holland, who had the great goodness to undertake to correct it, has been so ill, and then so engaged with Parliamentary business, that he has now only half finished his friendly task, and I was

very glad of an excuse for idleness. Are not poems, like port wine, the better for keeping? I think one Mr. Horace says so. God bless you, my dear friend!

Ever very sincerely yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Graham Club, St. James's Street.*

Bertram House, April 5, 1812.

My father and mother are in Hampshire, and I am just returned from one of those field rambles which in the first balmy days of spring are so enchanting. And yet the meadows, in which I have been walking are nothing less than picturesque. To a painter they would offer no attraction—to a poet they would want none. Read and judge for yourself in both capacities. It is a meadow, or rather a long string of meadows, irregularly divided by a shallow winding stream, swollen by the late rains to unusual beauty, and bounded on the one side by a ragged copse, of which the outline is perpetually broken by sheep walks and more beaten paths, which here and there admit a glimpse of low white cottages, and on the other by tall hedgerows, abounding in timber, and strewn like a carpet with white violets, primroses, and oxlips. Except that occasionally over the simple gates you catch a view of the soft and woody valleys, the village churches and the fine seats which distinguish this part of Berkshire, excepting this short and unfrequent peep at the world, you seem quite shut into these smiling meads.

Oh how beautiful they were to-day, with all their train of callow goslings and frisking lambs and laughing children chasing the butterflies that floated like animated flowers in the air, or hunting for birds' nests among the

golden-blossomed furze! How full of fragrance and of melody! It is when walking in such scenes, listening to the mingled notes of a thousand birds, and inhaling the mingled perfume of a thousand flowers, that I feel the real joy of existence. To live; to share with the birds and the insects the delights of this beautiful world; to have the mere consciousness of *being*, is happiness. You see how full the cup of joy is to-day that it runs over. If I was ever guided by any other motive than the feeling of the moment in writing to you, I certainly should not have chosen this time to send you a specimen of my rural enthusiasm, which you will receive in an atmosphere where enthusiasm cannot breathe—in the gay bustle of St. James's Street.

It is well for me that I can plead privilege (the privilege of gentle poesy) for my madness; or you might perhaps, out of friendship for papa, send down Dr. Willis and a strait waistcoat, or exert yourself to gain me an admission to St. Luke's. "Vastly well, madam! I forgive your description—I admit your apology—I know your privilege; but what is all this to my white moss roses?" My dear Sir William, be patient. "Patience is a virtue," was my writing-master's favourite copy. (I really had a writing master, whatever you may think of the matter.) Be patient, and you shall hear—that just at present I can tell you nothing about them. This, you know, is Sunday; and even if I could get to Reading (which, till the return of our equipage, a most commodious dog-cart, I cannot do), the worthy seedsman, Mr. Swallow, who adds to his other occupations that of spiritual teacher to a vast congregation of Methodists, certainly would not let me even look at his roses. I do not suppose he would even let the roses blow if he could help it. But to-morrow will be Monday; and to-morrow your faithful subjects

William Swallow, and George Mitford, and Mary Russell Mitford, and the dog-cart, and the white moss roses (if any such there be, for I never heard of them), and the yellow roses will meet together, and exert themselves in their several capacities to obey your royal mandate.

Monday, 6th of April,
Reading, Dr. Valpy's Study, 5 o'clock.

Well, my dearest Sir William, we have been with Mr. Swallow, and his white moss roses (or, rather, the report of his having them) proves to be, as I thought, entirely a mistake. He has, indeed, a very good variety of the moss rose, which he calls a "fair blush," and which are extremely cheap, only half a crown a plant. You will admit that this "fair blush" is a very proper present to young ladies, and (as they can be sent speedily and cheaply by Tromont's heavy coach) I told Mr. Swallow that it was very probable that you would authorise me to order some. The yellow roses are only a shilling each. If you wish to have any let me know as soon as possible, as this is the proper season for moving them. Adieu, my dear sir. Dinner is ready. I have only time to sign myself

Most affectionately yours,
M. R. M.

To Dr. Mitford, *New Slaughter's Coffee House.*

Bertram House, April 13, 1812.

Here I am, at last, thank Heaven! escaped from the devouring fondness of Ann G——, who was pleased to take what she calls a fancy to me. Here I am, and I have just five minutes "by Shrewsbury clock" to scold the naughtiest of all naughty papas for "telling the

secrets of the prison-house." Did not you know that I always designed to appear to advantage in the eyes of my good friend Sir William Elford?—that I meant to pass myself off to him for a very sensible, decorous, well-behaved young woman, quite free from the bad habits of poets and poetesses and such riff-raff? (This is a word I have just learnt from Miss G——.) And now you have told him all about my soliloquies, and my Maria, and all my evil ways; and, not content with that, you have crammed him full of your own conceits. What a shame! Did you see his letter? It was enchanting! He really has wit enough for half a county, and more I am sure than could be extracted from the brains of all the squires in Berkshire if they were "brazed in a mortar." Mamma has told you that at first it frightened me, and it really did. I had been reading Ariosto the night before, and trying to make her admire the story of Orillo's body running after his head; so that I was quite prepared for a little of the marvellous, and I am, you know, naturally a very credulous, silly, simple thing; so that I was really quite amazed. I shook from head to foot and blushed all over.

Talking of blushes reminds me that you must tell Sir William I have written to Mr. Swallow a note about the plants, which note is so full of particular directions that it really resembles the letter about a red Cardinal in the 'Walpoliana.' Pray tell him how very happy it makes me even to fancy myself of use to him or his family. Your account of General O—— is just what I expected. Ah! those generals are a sad breed —quarter-master generals and all! I dare say our new cousin is just such a poker as Lord Selkirk, with an iron head and an iron heart.

I am going on very merrily with 'Watlington Hill.'

I wrote one hundred and fifty lines last night. We shall not write till Tuesday.

Ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

[There is a long passage in one of Sir W. Elford's letters at this time in which he represents himself as the possessor of a magic crystal ball. It had been given him, he said, by an Ethiopian hermit, to whom he had rendered some signal service, and had the property, when held in both hands, of rendering him invisible and placing him in the society of whomsoever he would. The letter continues to say that he seldom took advantage of this power, but that he had recently used it for the pleasure of being with his correspondent, and he described the room at Alresford in which he had seen her, and related the topics of her conversation. Miss Mitford had been in Alresford on the day he stated, in such a room as he mentioned, and had talked upon the subjects that he had named. On first reading the letter she was naturally surprised, and found it difficult to account for the baronet's knowledge of these circumstances, but it turned out that his knowledge was not derived from the medium of any Ethiopian talisman, but from an accidental meeting with Dr. Mitford.]

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, 18, *Bury Street, St. James's.*

Bertram House, April 15, 1812.

Never since the "flying ball" which Cowley tossed about so gracefully, in the most pleasing though the least ambitious of his poems, was any ball so prettily played with, as your brilliant 'Talisman.' Indeed, my dear Sir William, if the ability of a romance writer (see what terrible names you bring upon yourself by

inventing Ethiopian Tales!) be estimated by the effect produced on his readers, you have good reason to be satisfied with your success: for never was any one so much amused as mamma, or so much frightened as your poor little correspondent. I really was frightened, though you will not believe me, and looked about the room, and searched, and listened, as if I thought you were actually present to witness the effect of your letter. Nay, I have been as nervous as a fine lady ever since; and yesterday, being gathering violets in a hedge, and finding myself pulled back from behind, I turned round in great glee, expecting to see you (you forgot to tell me whether you were palpable on such occasions), and was quite disappointed to see nothing but the stump of an old tree which had made a great rent in my gown. Perhaps you were there, nevertheless, malicious enough to vanish without speaking, as you did at Alresford.

By-the-way, I very much admire the taste which *willed* that the ball should carry you to Selborne. I am no naturalist—not for lack of inclination, but from a real want of physical powers; for though I have, to be sure, two ears and two eyes like other people, so miserably defective are these organs, that neither of them would serve me to distinguish a tomtit from a robin redbreast; and yet in spite of this misfortune I read Mr. White's 'History of Selborne' with unceasing delight. I really think that I have read it half a dozen times in my life. This appears extraordinary, but I believe that, in Mr. White's case, truth is the talisman. There is an air of reality in his descriptions which I meet with nowhere else; and we poets may talk as we will of fiction, but the gipsy is never attractive excepting when she borrows the garments of truth. Begin as I may, I always

tease you and betray myself by bringing in something about poetry. Well; as I have dipped one foot in the stream, I may as well make a bold plunge, and tell you at once that papa has two little poems of mine, with which, "as I guess," he intends to torment you; and as he certainly will show them to you, whether I will or no, I design to give him my most gracious permission.

Have I credit enough with you not to incur the charge of affectation if I venture to express a strictly natural sentiment, which has had the ill-fortune to be prostituted to the use of the sentimental, and to tell you that I am glad you will have something at Bickham which has once been here? I shall always be happy to be remembered by my kind and excellent correspondent; and I think I had rather be recalled to his memory by flowers than by anything else. This refers exclusively to the evening primrose plants, of which, luckily for my purpose, Mr. Swallow had none, and which are therefore sent from hence. You must not expect any delicate poetical flower; they are only fit for the borders of shrubberies and such places, where I think you will like them. The blossoms expand about half an hour or perhaps rather more, after sunset. In truth, nothing can be more vulgar than my taste in flowers, for which I have a passion. I like scarcely any but the common ones. First and best I love violets, and primroses, and cowslips, and wood anemones, and the whole train of field flowers; then roses of every kind and colour, especially the great cabbage rose; then the blossoms of the lilac and laburnum, the horse-chestnut, the asters, the jasmine, and the honeysuckle; and to close the list, lilies of the valley, sweet peas, and the red pinks which are found in

cottagers' gardens. This is my confession of faith. Pray don't betray me. Your more elegant collection was sent off by Tromont's coach last night. Adieu, my dear sir!

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, 18, *Bury Street, St. James's.*

Bertram House, April 22, 1812.

I am highly flattered, my dear Sir William, to find that you think my letters worth preserving. I keep yours as choice as the monks were wont to keep the relics of their saints; and about sixty years hence your grandson or great-grandson will discover in the family archives some notice of such a collection, and will send to the grandson of my dear cousin Mary (for as I intend to die an old maid, I shall make her heiress to all my property, *i. e.* my MSS.) for these inestimable remains of his venerable ancestor.* And then, you know, my letters will be rummaged out, and the whole correspondence will be sorted and transcribed, and sent to the press, adorned with portraits, and *fac similes*, and illustrated by lives of the authors, beginning with the register of their birth, and ending with their epitaphs. Then it will come forth into the world, and set all the men a-crowing and talking over their old nonsense (with more show of reason, however, than ordinary) about the superiority of the sex. What a fine job the transcriber of my letters will have! I hope the booksellers of those days will be liberal and allow the poor man a good price for his trouble; no

* There were very few of these letters found, and those of little interest.

one but an unraveller of state cyphers can possibly accomplish it.

What you say respecting my choice of flowers only proves that your taste is as humble as mine. But I do assure you that a jury of florists would give a verdict against us for bad taste in any country in Christendom. Why, here is my dear mamma, watching with careful eyes the unfolding of a magnificent camellia japonica, and here is our good neighbour, Mrs. Reeve (ah! ah! fair lady! I will teach you to steal into a room and look over my shoulder!)—here is Mrs. Reeve who ought to love what she so much resembles, and yet cannot endure the sight of a rose, except those which her gardener brings in February and March from her hot-house to her drawing-room; poor sickly flowers, which have never been fanned by the air of heaven, nor refreshed by any showers but those from a watering-pot. Ask either of these ladies (especially the last, for mamma loves all that is good and all that is beautiful, whether in a field or a garden, a cottage window or a drawing-room) what flowers they admire, and they will answer you by a thousand unspeakable names of bulbs from Caffraria, and shrubs from the American mountains. For my part, I am delighted at this coincidence of taste between us. I place flowers in the very first rank of simple pleasures; and I have no very good opinion of the hard worldly people who take no delight in them.

Whitley Cottage, Friday.

Did you ever happen to write with a pen twenty years old, and just a drop and a half of ink, in the midst of a universal clackit of female tongues? If you never did, you are no competent judge of my present

situation, and to describe it is impossible. Who can describe the almost inconceivable *mêlange* of a true female gossip; where dress and music, dancing and preaching, pelisses and beaux, flowers and scandal, all meet together, like the oil and vinegar of a salad? It must, however, plead my apology for all blunders.

How short a time you stay in London this year! Not even to see the Exhibition open, though you will of course see it with the rest of the great people before it is opened to the public. Have you a picture there this year?

Adieu, my dear sir. Mamma desires her best respects.

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, May 25, 1812.

I believe, my dear Sir William, that you will not need "one to come from the grave" to inform you that I am no metaphysicianess (is there such a word?); and yet, without consulting Mr. Locke or Mr. Stewart, or even the poetico-metaphysical Mr. Coleridge, I am quite certain that the time which seems while it is passing the fastest (or, rather, which treads so lightly as to banish all idea of time) is that which on looking back seems the longest. Your visit seemed an hour, and it fills in my memory the space of a month; and I must refer you to Rosalind, and the vanity of all men, to judge whether time will amble or trot with me till I have the pleasure of seeing you again.

Among other visits I spent a few days lately about fifteen miles off in Oxfordshire, where I saw a landscape,

or rather a series of landscapes, of singular beauty. The country is certainly very fine; cultivated hill and dale, richly mingled with luxuriant beech woods, unfolding their beautiful shining leaves almost before your eyes; and, to my astonishment, every opening of these lovely woods, every village green, and even the hedgerows by the roadside were planted with cherry trees, the largest that I had ever seen, and so full of blossom that they seemed like garlands of snow. I am sure that we saw upwards of two thousand of these trees in our way from Nettlebed to Reading, and it was the prettiest sight I ever saw in my life. Papa says that it is finer than the apple orchards of Herefordshire; and I can readily believe him, because there the trees are artificially disposed, and here they are scattered with the wildness and profusion of nature.

It was on our return from this visit that we heard of the dreadful murder of Mr. Perceval. Human nature turns with abhorrence from the contemplation of such deeds; but I cannot help saying that I firmly believe the wretched perpetrator to have been insane. He had all the determination of the powers of mind to one dreadful object, which is the so frequent characteristic of madness; and the infatuation which led him to believe that if he could make out a strong case against government he should be acquitted, was a sufficient proof of the aberration of reason. I think, however, that it was perfectly right to hang him on every account. If he were rational he deserved it; and if he were not, hanging was a thousand times more merciful than perpetual imprisonment in the dungeons of Newgate or the wards of Bedlam.

Your cuckoo story amused without surprising me. I am quite accustomed to hear "the great vulgar and

the small" in this neighbourhood connect the ideas of the cuckoo and the nightingale in a manner quite as absurd as your Ilchester waiter. No one can say, "How sweetly the nightingale sang last night," but pat comes answer, like an A B C book, "And the cuckoo this morning; I heard it for five minutes!" And then, if any one should happen to notice this strange unison of the most delightful, the most various, and the most powerful of all our songsters with that tiresome, monotonous, detestable bird, why then, forsooth! out comes a long rigmarole which begins by preaching about the association of ideas, and finishes by quoting Gray's 'Harbinger of Spring;' as if people did not know that spring was come, without having it dinned into their ears by a voice which I think worse than all the hateful sounds that we seem to hear when we look on Hogarth's print of 'The Enraged Musician.'

Papa enjoined me to tell you that a redbreast of his acquaintance has this year taken possession of the vacant mansion of a thrush in our shrubbery, and, having put in new furniture, has brought up a fine family of six in this spacious dwelling. I suppose this is somewhat extraordinary, for papa seemed extremely desirous to get me as a witness of the fact, and dragged me divers times "through brake and through briar" to try to see it; till at last, being quite tired of these expeditions, I said I did see something like a bird's head; but I am afraid that it resembled the cloud in 'Hamlet,' and might have been "like a camel or an ousel" for aught that I could make out of it. This dear father has been for the last few days in London, which swarms, he says, with ministers expectant.

How did you like the 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers?' I am almost afraid to tell you how much

I dislike 'Childe Harold.' Not but that there are very many fine stanzas and powerful descriptions; but the sentiment is so strange, so gloomy, so heartless, that it is impossible not to feel a mixture of pity and disgust, which all our admiration of the author's talents cannot overcome. I would rather be the poorest Greek whose fate he commiserates, than Lord Byron, if this poem be a true transcript of his feelings. Out of charity we must hope that his taste only is in fault, and that the young lordling imagines that there is something interesting in misery and misanthropy. I the readier believe this, as I am intimate with one of his lordship's most attached friends, and he gives him an excellent character.

VERSES TO LORD REDESDALE.*

Redesdale! for those whose faint and grateful cry
Is checked by sobs or smothered by a sigh;
For those whose eyes, whene'er they hear thy name,
Flash through their tears Hope's long-forgotten flame;
For those condemned uncounted years to tell,
By minute groans, within their prison cell;
For those I thank thee! O presumptuous task!
What other thanks than theirs does Redesdale ask?
How weak the fame the lowly songstress rears
To the unspoken praise that floats in tears!
What incense half so sweet as that which driven
By grateful captives' sighs ascends to heaven!
One only to thy soul more dear can be—
The shout when these sad captives shall be free:
Then, while thine ear shall weaker praise resign,
Then thy glad heart will cry, This deed was mine.

Behold the captive of some petty debt,
Whose tears an aged wife's cold bosom wet;

* On some motion for relaxing the law of imprisonment for debt.

Who hangs upon his lovely daughter's arm,
Watching each languid smile, each withering charm,
While fondness mourns the rose that fades so fast,
And Reason wishes that soft bloom were past;
What thought can comfort him! His wife in vain
Seeks to assuage his grief and ease his pain;
Sinking with famine, still with hope she cheers—
Unmarked her words—her voice alone he hears,
Whose hollow tones make mockery of joy;
Sees but the eyes that hope itself destroy,
The sunken cheeks, the forced and ghastly smile,
And the cold hand that can no longer toil.
He turns, in flaxen curls and eyes of blue,
And rosy lips, a direr ill to view.
Then through his brain, while sad forebodings roll,
Remembered joys come thronging o'er his soul:
For the red lofty walls, that bar all light,
His whitewashed cot appears in sunshine bright;
Tall trees rise proudly in the western beam,
And gurgles down the hill the sparkling stream;
Beneath the vine-wreathed porch his wife serene
Smiles at the joyous sports upon the green;
And she who leads the dance in beauty mild,
So young, so fair, so gay—it is his child!
If ever Innocence can know despair,
'Tis from such trance to start to find them there!
Mitford! I will not yield the honest fame
Thy Virtues cast on my paternal name!
Mitford! Heav'n speed thy efforts, well employed,
E'en though thy generous aim should be destroyed;
E'en shouldst thou fail the prison gate to ope,
Thou giv'st the captive much in giving Hope.
O Hope most deeply shared! soon may the wind
Play round his brow in freshness unconfined!
Free as the wave, or as the roving cloud,
May he too wander, of his being proud,
Tasting the sweets of his young liberty,
Remembering all his woes—and blessing thee!

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

* 1812. *Feb. 24th.*

MILTON.

(FROM 'WATLINGTON HILL.')

O when I dared the Muse to name,
Did it not wake my spirits' flame?
Did it not guide my eye, my soul,
To yonder distant shadowy knoll,
And whisper in each joyous thrill
'Tis Milton's home—'tis Forest Hill!
Yes; there he lived, and there he sung,
When Life and Hope and Love were young;
There, Grace and Genius at his side,
He won his half-disdainful bride;
And there the lark, "in spite of sorrow,"
Still at his "window bade good morrow,
Through the sweet briar, or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine."
O happy hill! thy summer vest
Lives in his richest colouring drest:
O happy hill! thou saw'st him blest:
Thou saw'st him blest, the greatest man
That ever trode Life's grovelling span;
Shakespeare alone with him could try,
Undazzled and untired, the sky.
And thou didst view his blooming charm,
That eagle, plumed like the dove,
Whose very sleeping grace could warm
The Italian maiden's heart to love.
Thou saw'st him in his happier hour
When Life was Love and Genius power;
When at his touch the awaken'd string
All joyous hailed the laughing spring,
And like the sun his radiant eyes
Glanced on the earthly Paradise.
Thou didst not see those eyes so bright
For ever quenched in cheerless night;
Thou didst not hear his anguished lays
Of "evil tongues and evil days."
Thou saw'st but his gay youth, sweet spot!
Happiest for what thou saw'st not!

And happy still—though in thy sod
No blade remains by Milton trod;
Though the sweet gale that sweeps thy plain
No touch of Milton's breath retain;
Yet here the bards of later days
Shall roam to view thee and to praise.
Here Jones,* ere yet his voice was fame,
A lone romantic votary came:
He too is gone—untimely gone!
But, lured by him, full many a one
Shall tread thy hill on pilgrimage;
And minstrel, patriot, and sage,
Who wept not o'er his Indian bier,
Shall mourn him with his Milton here!
For, till our English tongue be dead,
From Freedom's breast till life be fled,
Till Poetry's quick pulse be still,
None shall forsake thee, Forest Hill!

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, June 14, 1812.

I have so much to thank you for, my dear Sir William, in your last delightful letter, that I am really reduced to the good old-fashioned way of beginning at the beginning, instead of serving you as I do my poems —dashing into the middle and reserving the commencement for the conclusion.

Do not think, because I laugh at these, that I am at all disposed to dispute a doctrine so clear and so beautiful as the Association of Ideas.† What would the poet do without it? What the painter? The images which we describe or delineate are as a drop of water in the ocean compared to the train of sentiments which we excite, or the imagery which we

* Sir William Jones.

† The doctrine Miss Mitford alludes to is that of Alison, 'On Taste.'

awaken. In this, it has always appeared to me, consists the great advantage of *our* arts over music. Fine music is certainly a very high and exquisite pleasure. It is like the perfume of roses; and, when it ceases, leaves upon the mind nothing but a vague impression of enjoyment, without awakening one thought for the fancy to feed on when the gratification of the senses has subsided. I know that I have great poetical authorities (Dryden and Moore) against me in this heterodoxy. The *Ranz des Vaches* and some simple airs more talked of than played, do, it is true, produce considerable emotion in awakening the dear remembrance of a native land. But I would ask even the most devoted musical enthusiast, whether, in the higher branches of composition, in the fine pieces of the Germans and the Italians, anything is touched, anything is thought of, but the ear?

In painting and poetry, on the contrary, the higher we mount the more we find to awaken the springs of thought and set the enchantress Fancy to bring before us new worlds even more lovely than those before our bodily eyes; so that in standing before a Madonna of Raphael we may exclaim, "*Ed anch' io son pittore;*" though we never touched a pencil; and rise from the perusal of Homer framing a more enchanting 'Iliad,' though we have never written a line.

Now that we are upon the subject of association, you will not wonder that the idea of the 'Iliad' suggested the idea of 'Watlington Hill.' It is printing, and you will soon see it. I am glad that it is printing, for as my punning papa says the hill was growing into a mountain. The death of my kind and venerable friend Lady Macclesfield obliged me to add near a hundred lines. My father is in town; so that I have

not been able to look again after the redbreasts. Do not forget my commission respecting the song. Mamma desires her best compliments. Adieu, my dear and most kind friend.

Ever affectionately yours,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *New Slaughter's Co ee House.*

Bertram House, June 16, 1812.

You would find, my darling, by the parcel we sent this morning by the seven o'clock coach, that your kind intention of the basket arriving in time for dinner yesterday was defeated. Everything was, however, perfectly good. Two of the mackerel we shall eat to-day, and the other two we have pickled—so this is all right. The gowns are just exactly what they ought to be—strong, neat, and cheap. I never liked any so well in my life, and the pleasure was the greater as it was wholly unexpected; for I firmly believed that you would send some pretty flimsy muslin that would soil in a day and wear out in a week.

What vile wretches these ministers are to think of putting an additional tax on dogs of all kinds, and a still greater one on greyhounds. I told Mr. Smith that I was no partisan; but I will be a Whig, or a Jacobin, or anything now, to oppose these stupid, tasteless, ninny-hammers, with Nicholas Vansittart at their head. It is, however, a tacit confession of the superiority of coursing to any other kind of amusement. Don't you think, though, that the tax will wonderfully operate in transforming the dear, lovely creatures into another species of dog? Even Marmion himself may lie down a greyhound at night, and get up a lurcher in the

morning! How Mr. H—— will trick the taxgatherer! Nobody knows where to find his long-tails, and he will escape Scot free.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, July 1, 1812.

Thanks be to your Plymouth electors, and to Colonel Bloomfield, and to you, and to all the causes and agents concerned in your franking promise. Not because it saves my purse, although that is of course properly light and poetical, but because it gives me a charming prospect of a double portion of sense and wit from "my dear, and good, and kind correspondent."

To say that I anticipate with delight every book of Miss Edgeworth's is but to re-echo the opinion of all the world; but I must do my own taste the justice to say that I delight in her works for the same reason that you admire them—her exquisite distinction of character; whereas I am convinced that at least nine-tenths of her readers are caught solely by the humour of her dialogue and the liveliness of her illustrations—the mere costume and drapery of her enchanting pictures. I am not, however, sure that I shall like Anne of Brittany the better for being historical. I never read an historical novel in my life that I did not exchange my little previous knowledge of the period and characters referred to, for the falsified events and imaginary personages of the novelist; and in spite of Sir Robert Walpole's notion of history, I am by no means certain that the change is in my favour. And yet this strange aberration of memory is as natural as it is humiliating. There is something so delightful in the idea of pene-

trating into the minds and motives of those heroes and statesmen of whom the historian tells us nothing but the actions; something so attractive in seeing the warrior softened—not degraded—into humanity and partaking of our wants, our wishes, and our hopes, that we lend ourselves willingly to the delusion, and are contented to resign the meagre outline of Hume for the brilliant colouring of Miss Porter. It is this which renders Shakespeare's historical plays so infinitely interesting, in defiance of Aristotle and Voltaire.

By-the-way, when we were abusing Kemble, I wonder (only I believe that I was a little *dashed*) that I did not tell you that I have a theory respecting play-writing and play-acting which Shakespeare certainly, and I think Garrick, contrived to realise. It does appear to me that no man can be a perfect tragedian who is not likewise a good actor in the higher branch of comedy. A statesman not at the council board, and a hero when the battle is safely ended, would, as it seems to me, talk and walk much in the same way with other people. Even a tyrant does not always rave, nor a lover always whine. A king may order his horse without a start, and a misanthrope talk of the weather without a groan.

Now, Messrs. Kemble and Co. never do converse—they always declaim, and that not in the very best manner; so that between long pauses and unnatural cadences, the audience have nothing for it but to fall asleep and dream of Shakespeare. That he and all the writers of Elizabeth's days (the real Augustan age of English poetry) were of my opinion, I am quite sure. Nothing is more remarkable in their delightful dramas, especially in those of Ford, Massinger, and Fletcher, than the sweet and natural tone of conversation which sometimes relieves the terrible intensity of their plots

like a flowery glade in a gloomy forest, or a sunbeam streaming up a winter sky. I hope you give me credit for proving that my theory (unlike most modern theories) is practicable, by deducing it from the actual practice of our poets. I cannot take leave of the drama without adding my feeble tribute of regret for the secession of Mrs. Siddons. Yet it was better that she should quit the stage in undiminished splendour than have remained to show the feeble twilight of so glorious a day. Tragedy, poor Tragedy! must now fly from her superb arena and take shelter in the pages of Shakespeare and the bosom of Miss Baillie.

Have your maiden-blush moss-roses and your yellow roses blown yet? My yellow roses are all eaten this year by some abominable insect with which you, as a naturalist, have probably the honour of being acquainted. Not one rose have I been able to save. So much the worse for my good friend Mrs. Monck; for, as I can't do without them, I go to Coley Park and steal hers. You can't conceive what a thief I am in my heart. I went to Lord Rivers's the other day to see his stud, and I was seized with a prodigious inclination to steal near a hundred greyhounds. Luckily, however, I recollected that, if I stole the greyhounds, I must likewise steal the keepers; and, if I stole the keepers, I must steal the house and kennels; and, if I stole the house and kennels, I must steal money to keep them, which might, you know, have certain consequences not very agreeable. So I actually came away without stealing, and, what is still more extraordinary, without even begging a greyhound puppy. I have been thinking what I had to say to you, but I cannot think, because the room is so distressingly quiet. Mamma is at work, and papa (who I verily believe fancies I am composing an epic

poem) has taken up a book, not to interrupt me. Now nothing is to me so *fidgeting* (forgive this female word) as silence. Dryden has been much laughed at for a line of his—

"A horrid stillness now invades the ear"—

which Johnson (I think) defended upon the ground that stillness, like darkness, is privation, and that the personification is allowable. I should have defended it, too, for a different reason. Is there such a thing as perfect stillness—as an entire absence of all sound? I think not. It appears to me that what we call stillness is, in fact, only a substitution of lower for louder sounds. I do not, indeed, hear my dear father's cheerful voice; but I can hear the rain dropping on the skylight, the wind jarring the doors, the turning over the leaves of the book, nay even the very movement of mamma's quick-passing needle; and I think you will agree with me that "point," "quint" and "quatorze," the triumphs and even the murmurings of picquet, were preferable to this unquiet stillness. I fear, too, that you will agree with what I know mamma thinks, that it is time to say good-night, and go to bed. You do not like naughty children, I know; so I will only stay to present my dear, dear parents' kindest remembrances. Good-night and pleasant dreams, my dear friend!

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

Do not wonder if you do not receive this for a week. It will wait till papa goes to town for a frank. God bless you!

[The following song was sent in the next letter.]

Sweet is the balmy evening hour
And mild the glowworms' light;
And soft the breeze that sweeps the flower
With pearly dewdrops bright.
I love to loiter on the hill,
And catch each trembling ray;
Fair as they are they mind me still
Of fairer things than they.

What is the breath of closing flowers
But feeling's gentlest sigh?
What are the dewdrops' crystal showers
But tears from Pity's eye?
What are the glowworms by the rill
But Fancy's flashes gay?
I love them for they mind me still
Of one more dear than they.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, July 12, 1812.

My dear Sir William,

Pray make one of your prettiest speeches for me when you present the enclosed song, with my best respects, to your daughters. I wish it were better worth their acceptance; but I can't help it. Song-writing is certainly not my forte. It would be difficult, perhaps, to discover what is. This, however, is unhappily so bad that excuses will only serve to make it worse; so I will say no more about it.

I have just been reading Miss Edgeworth,* and I am delighted. Lady Julia is a sentimentalist of the first order, and has, of course, no small dash of folly mixed up with her eloquence. But Lady Sarah is Miss Edgeworth's *chef-d'œuvre.* I have not the slightest doubt of her having invented this character, because

* 'Tales of Fashionable Life.'

genius always creates and leaves to patient dullness the mean and bounded drudgery of imitation; and yet I know a lady who is the exact resemblance of this exquisite portrait. I have known her intimately from a child, and never saw her without thinking of Mount Etna—above, all snow; below, all fire. She is of the despised order of old maids, and it seems that to have been a wife and a mother would have bounded her usefulness, which is now extended to the whole circle of her acquaintance. I have the highest respect, esteem, and admiration for her excellent qualities, and I am told that I am one of her favourites; but I do assure you, that I don't think I ever in my life ventured to talk to her of anything but the weather, and was obliged to content myself with monosyllabic answers even to that.

Apropos to the weather; pray do you think it will rain? I wish you would take up your "brilliant ball" and come and tell me. Dear me, what shall I do for somebody who is weatherwise, to decide the grand point of whether they shall carry or whether they shall mow? I am talking of the haymakers. You must know, my dear friend, papa is gone to the Quarter Sessions at Abingdon, and mamma is gone with him to pay a visit in the neighbourhood, and I am left commander-in-chief of the whole corps. A very merry corps they certainly are: I can't complain of silence now. Among them we have one famous whistler; so famous, that our man, who is a sort of country wit, says that "nothing but spite and malice keeps him out of the playhouse." And as to singers, I am certain that one of them goes as high as Catalani: I never heard anything to equal it except a friend of mine who went into hysterics because she was out-scolded by her husband. *She*, I think, did scream louder. Besides this, one of the ladies of my party has

a squalling brat in a cradle under the trees; and another has brought a shouting boy of six years old to watch a screaming girl of two. Don't you envy me my concert?

Tuesday evening.—Now if I were hardhearted, I should leave you in suspense as to the result of my deliberations and the fate of my hay. The novelists, you know, always contrive to break off at interesting periods; and what can be more interesting to a farmer than the fate of a haymaking? But this artifice is too common for me. I will ease you, my dear Sir William, of the anxiety you doubtless feel on my account, by informing you that they all mowed away as if for life or death, and that we have not had one drop of rain. I will tell you, moreover, how it came about. Before I wrote to you I had consulted every soul—man, woman, or child—about the place, as to the weather; and they all, as if with one voice, declared, "they did not know—it looked rather *duberous;* it might rain or it might not; they would do just as I pleased." One would have thought they belonged to the *Corps Diplomatique*, for not one of them would even give an opinion. At last I was fortunate enough to get a positive answer from an old washerwoman, whom I spied coming and consulted out of the window:—"Why yes, miss, you had better carry—that is the *safe-side* at all events." This phrase decided me. I am none of the *safe-siders*, not I, in anything. I have a sovereign contempt for the whole set, and I am, and always was, a little *contradiente*. So "mow" was the word, and the sun and the wind and the clouds and the sky have been everything that is charming and amiable and obliging ever since.

Did you ever hear a Methodist sermon? I do not mean an "evangelical discourse," as they call it, from one of the "serious consistent Christians," in a church o

chapel; but a raving, ranting, shouting field-preacher?—such an one, in short, as I heard to-night, without intending it. I was very quietly gathering roses and honeysuckles in the garden (with which, by-the-way, I fill every room in the house, so that papa says it stinks of flowers), when all on a sudden there issued from a large barn, nearly opposite, a full chorus of voices, compared to which my haymaking concert was stillness and harmony. This was absolutely astounding. It quite startled my poor old dog, who is as deaf as a post, and would have frightened me too if I had not guessed what it was. This burst did not last long—it could not—and was succeeded by a sermon, which, if I had not known it must be a sermon, I should undoubtedly have taken for the violent swearing of a man in a passion. At the distance at which I stood I caught only the emphatic words, and they consisted almost entirely of the most sacred names united to those which must not be mentioned "to ears polite." I am sure that he apostrophized the devil five times in one minute. I had my watch, and I am quite sure of it. Indeed, one of our damsels who went with the rest of the congregation to hear this awakening preacher, says "she wonders he didn't call him up, he *braved* him so!" This holy man comes from Norwich. He preached yesterday five sermons at different places in the neighbourhood, and some of our farmers' wives went to hear him every time. Their husbands were wiser.

Heaven grant you patience to bear with my letters—so many and so long! You are a "much enduring" man; and you know with how much regard I am always, my dear sir,

Your faithul and affectionate friend,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 24, 1812.

For the first time in my life, my dear Sir William, I sit down to answer your delightful letter with real regret. You know what is coming. We are all infinitely obliged for your most friendly invitation, and should have been truly happy to accept it had it been possible, but we have no less than five previous engagements. I should so much have liked to have seen you again, and to have been introduced to Bickham and to Bickham's fair inhabitants, and to everything within and without it—cuckoos inclusive. In the mean time I comfort myself with thinking that you certainly will not punish the poor nightingales for my misfortunes. I have not delivered your message to them, and I won't; and they will wisely have taken flight before you can find another messenger. If you had heard them here in June you would have been as constant to them as the Persian rose. They were but practising their airs and graces when you were here.

God bless you, my dear friend! Accept the kindest remembrances of our family, and our repeated thanks for your invitation.

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Sept. 3, 1812.

I have just returned from Southampton. Have you ever been at that lovely spot, which combines all that is enchanting in wood and land and water with all that is "buxom, blythe, and debonair" in society—that

charming town, which is not a watering-place only because it is something better? Do not be afraid of a long description. The scenery of the south of Hampshire is of all others the most difficult to describe; for it is not the picturesque which may be thrown off in a few careless strokes; or the sublime which, with the wish to delineate it, almost inspires the power; but the beautiful—sometimes in its gayest, and sometimes in its softest dress—but always the beautiful, of which the prevailing and pervading charm is not the woods or streams or villages, nor even the sparkling ocean, but the exquisite arrangement and combination of the whole. Southampton has, however, in my eyes, an attraction independent even of its scenery, in the total absence of the vulgar hurry of business or the chilling apathy of fashion. It is, indeed, all life, all gaiety: but it has an airiness, an animation, which might become the capital of Fairyland. The very motion of its playful waters, uncontaminated by commerce or by war, seems in unison with the graceful yachts that sail upon their bosom; while the shores fringed with oak to the very margin, and studded with the fairest vestiges of ancient magnificence and modern comfort, seem to connect the past with the present, like the wild yet bewitching imagery of a poet's dream. But perhaps your favourite doctrine of association may have something to do with my enthusiastic partiality for this place. I have always been so very happy there, that to me Southampton would be beautiful, even though it were as dolorous as Winchester, or as dirty as Old Brentford.

P.S.—Can you read this epistle of mine, which I have written so small and so close because I have no frank? I see in the papers an advertisement from a man who offers to teach writing to grown ladies and

gentlemen, and I have some thoughts, when I go to town, of taking a few lessons solely for your benefit. God bless you, my dear friend!

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Oct. 18, 1812.

How very kind it was in you, my dear sir, to remember me in the midst of all the hurry and turmoil of this septennial infliction, when candidates and the friends of candidates are by custom and prescription allowed to know none but electors and electors' wives and daughters.

If you are as tired of elections as I am, you will thank me for releasing you from this theme, even though it be to speak on one as trite and almost as acrimonious—the Prize Address.* Oh! renowned committeemen! From all the selected fruits of all the poetical costermongers of Great Britain, Ireland, and Berwick-upon-Tweed, could ye choose nothing more promising than this green sour apple? I am really astonished that Lord Byron could write anything so stamped with the curse of mediocrity, that even the strong shadow of Dr. Busby fails to throw it out with anything like effect. Now I know very well that you will no sooner arrive at the end of this passage than you will lay down my letter, and give half a nod and an entire smile, and look extremely wise and more than extremely saucy, and say to yourself, "Ah, this baggage has been scribbling herself! This is all pique, mere pique! She is disappointed that the solid pudding and

* On the opening of Drury Lane Theatre.

the empty praise did not fall to her lot. Oh, female vanity!—female vanity!" And in so saying you will be half right and half wrong. I did, indeed, commit the sin of writing; but to the folly of expecting, I plead "Not guilty" with a safe conscience. I wrote, because I promised papa so to do, on the very last open day, under the leaden influence of an oppressive cold. And my address was, as might be expected, a thousand times worse than Lord Byron's, but extremely like it. If they are ever published I will give you the key to mine, for it is so impertinent that I do not think you would ever guess it. "Mark how this becomes the house!"

God bless you! Adieu!

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford.

Bertram House, Oct. 27, 1812.

The echoing Town Hall is at length empty—the din of tongues is at an end—the well-fee'd lawyers have ceased to browbeat or to cajole—their unhappy clients have for a short space forgotten to murmur—the stealers of chickens and pilferers of corn-sheaves, the reluctant menders of bad roads, and the still more reluctant wedders of disconsolate damsels—some in the friendly clutch of the gaoler, some in the still harder grasp of the parish officer—have taken their departure; and the bench itself, with all its precious lumber, the simpering simpletons who talk nonsense in its original form of silly frivolity, and the solemn coxcombs who talk the far worse nonsense which looks like dull sense, have at length retired to forget their fatigues in port and politics. In a word, the first day of the Quarter Sessions is ended, and my father informs me that to-

morrow will be an excellent opportunity to initiate some of the new members into the use of the only privilege which I was ever disposed to envy them—to frank this letter.

I am afraid—but pray don't tell of my misfortune—that to my unfashionable organs the exquisite variety of Dryden is more agreeable than the uniform sweetness of Pope. I hope you do not suspect me of comparing Pope to Miss Seward; though I must confess that I did often compare her letters (while reading them, with pleasure, with curiosity, but without one spark of respect or affection) with that enchanting Madame de Sevigné, whom one is tempted to adore—with that amiable Cowper, whom it is impossible not to love—and with that delightful Lord Orford, who forces one at will to laugh and to admire. Apropos to Lord Orford, I have just been reminded of a letter of his, in which he describes Netley Abbey, with its beautiful surrounding scenery, in nearly the same point of view in which I attempted to delineate it.*

You are right in supposing Mr. Chamberlayne to be the gentleman who will succeed to the great Dummer property at the death of Lady Holland. Netley Abbey forms a part of this demesne; and I suppose its vicinity to the large estate, of which he has so near a prospect, was one reason, joined to its almost unrivalled situation, for his fixing on Weston Grove for the site of his fairy palace. If he had not spent all his treasures, as he says, in this election contest (the deuce take election contests! You are the only wise man of my acquaintance, for being absolutely proof against temptation), he and Dr. Parr and Mr. Fox and I (a very pretty quartetto!) should all have cut a resplendent figure in

* In a poem called 'Weston.'

stone and on paper; for he, Mr. Chamberlayne, meant to have erected a column to the memory of Mr. Fox, "now that it seems forgotten by princes and people," and Dr. Parr had written a beautiful Latin inscription for the said column, and you cannot doubt (at least you must make-believe that there can be no doubt about it) that I should have composed an equally beautiful *éloge* on the object in vulgar English. I should indeed have written *con amore;* and yet, with all due deference to Dr. Parr and to politics, I am not sure that, if I were to erect a column to Mr. Fox I would not sooner inscribe it with that one sweet sentence of Gibbon's, which you must remember as well as I,* than with all the Latin that ever was written in the world.

You will forgive me for my idolatry with regard to Fox, and I will forgive you for your '*Belle Démocrate,*' and your saucy and inconsistent insinuation that I, the said *Démocrate,* am a well-wisher to Napoleon, the greatest enemy to Democracy that ever existed. I will not pretend to prophesy how he may escape from his "Moscow grid-iron;" but I am afraid, greatly afraid, that he who has a trick of finding resources where no one else would dream of looking for them, will not be so easily vanquished as our ministers and the magnanimous Alexander appear to anticipate. Most sincerely do I wish that he may be entangled in inextricable difficulties, for then I should hope that we, that England, that the world might have some chance for the only political object which seems to me worth a wish or a prayer—that this

* "In his tour to Switzerland Mr. Fox gave me two days of free and private society. He seemed to feel and even to envy the happiness of my situation; while I admired the powers of a superior man, as they are blended in his attractive character with the softness and simplicity of a child. Perhaps no human being was ever more perfectly exempt from the taint of malevolence, vanity, or falsehood."

dreadful, this exterminating contest, might at length terminate in peace. I show some confidence in your good opinion when I dare to tell you—without fearing to incur the suspicion of being a mere namby-pamby miss, striving to look amiable—that peace! peace! peace! is my political creed. Oh, my dear sir, lose for a moment that feeling of habit of familiarity with blood, by which we are apt, reversing more madly the mad error of Don Quixote, to look upon armies as flocks of sheep prepared for their necessary slaughter; reflect that they are men, treading upon the same earth, breathing the same air, endowed with the same faculties, the same feelings, the same affections as ourselves; bound, too, by the same ties of social sympathy and of natural connections; and then view them dead, dying, mangled in the field of battle, or burning with their wives and children amid their smoking habitations: think that all this may happen on English ground; and then support war if you can.

I care not who makes peace, whether Lord Grey, Lord Castlereagh, or Sir Francis Burdett, or what be the party watchword, whether the silly cry of "No Popery," or the equally silly one of "Catholic Emancipation"; let us have peace; and our sinful nation will be at once absolved from half her crimes. I know not how you will pardon me for having thus intruded on you a woman's politics, though you partly drew the evil upon yourself. I can only promise to offend so no more, and have recourse to your section of a jerk*—("I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word")—to obliterate the remembrance.

* A jerk was the name that Sir W. Elford gave to the wavy line, ∽, which he used to make in his letters on changing his subject.

Pray, my dear friend, have you read the little volume of 'Rejected Addresses?' If you have not, you positively must. It is absolutely delightful! and it is extremely magnanimous in me to think and to say so; for the author has contrived to affront me in the tenderest point—not my verses; there, thank Heaven! my happy insignificance protected me—but in my *name.* If there was one thing in which I took a pride, it was in that old respectable name of mine. It was such a comfort to be neither Short nor Long, nor White nor Brown, nor Green, nor Black, to belong to no streets or alleys—to have nothing to do with the vulgar tribes of Jackson, Robson, Dobson, or Gilbertson—to appertain, in short, to the genteel family of the "fords," and carry the mark of Domesday Book upon one's very tickets.

Well, my dear Sir William, what do you think this wicked wit of a writer has taken it into his head to do? He has actually introduced this dearly-beloved name of "Mitford" (which I mean to keep, nevertheless) as belonging to a fireman, among a heap of Muggins's and Huggins's and Scroggins's and Higginbottoms, in a parody upon Walter Scott! And what do you think may be the appellation of this impertinent? "Oh! Howard, or Percy, or Clifford, or Devereux, or Scrope." No; it is neither. His name is one compared to which the Whites, the Browns, the Shorts, the Greens, the Streets, and the Jacksons are elegant and uncommon; his name is neither more nor less than Smith!—James Smith, attorney-at-law in the good city of London! After all, he is so clever, that I must forgive him. I am not sure that I do not like the prose addresses, Cobbett's and Johnson's, better than the verse; though Fitzgerald's loyal effusion, the whole of Wordsworth's,

and part of Southey's, Coleridge's, and Scott's are admirable for the nice imitation of style which is intermixed with the broad burlesque.

Adieu, my dear sir.

Your sincere and affectionate friend,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Temple Bar.*

Bertram House, Nov. 29, 1812.

The amount of Mr. Frazer's bill must be paid to Messrs. Nelson and Co., King's Road, Chelsea, who are the attorneys, or to Messrs. Frazer, Sloane Square, Chelsea; and it must be paid on Monday (to-morrow): Tuesday will be too late. I hope you have ascertained the time to which the writ is extended. I expect that it must be returned on Tuesday. If you are not sure of the money from Robins, had not you better write to Monck by to-morrow's post, and appoint to be with him on Tuesday? Pray do not delay.

Mamma has not told you that Mr. Taylor was obliged to declare himself the champion of my literary fame at Tunbridge. 'Christina' was the subject of conversation one day at General Murray's, and Mr. T. mentioning my other poems, quoted with praise the simile of the floating primrose in the 'Lines to a Yellow Butterfly;' whereupon two ladies present, Miss Henderson and Miss Lockhart, asserted that they had heard a gentleman (a pretty gentleman, truly!) repeat the whole stanza more than once as his own composition. He did my verses great honour. Mr. Taylor of course contended for my right to this unlucky quatrain, and gave in his own name as voucher. Most unluckily he had forgotten before he called on us *that* of the petty

thief, though I am pretty sure he said he was a clergyman; but this mamma strenuously denies. My poor Mogul is lamer than ever to-day. I am afraid it is a rick in the shoulder, which lasts sometimes a long while. He asks after you every day. Adieu, my own dearest papa! Marmion and Jack are quite well.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Dec. 13, 1812.

I sit down, my dear Sir William, to tell you, as well as I can, what I think of 'Clarissa.' It is some years since I read it, and even then I skipped a good part of it; but it is one of those works which it is impossible ever to forget, because it stamps itself, not on the memory, but the heart. What a genius had Richardson! With every fault of style, of plot, of subject, which a writer could have—with the most wearying repetitions, the most distressing coarseness of painting—with characters the most abhorrent to our feelings, and scenes the most repugnant to our delicacy—he has yet contrived to enchain our every thought and passion: and this he has effected by his angelic heroine, and by her alone. Clarissa was from first to last the sole object which inspired me with any, the smallest degree, of interest and affection; and I am not sure (so malicious am I) whether I was not almost as much pleased with the earthly punishment of the Harlowes—that detestable race!—as with the beatification of their sainted daughter. You see that I do not agree with those critics who object to the character of Lovelace as too agreeable. Agreeable, truly! I am not sure that

Solmes is not the more bearable animal of the two. The fault in my opinion is *vice versâ*. Lovelace is now so degraded by his vices that Clarissa could not have loved him without degradation; and, accordingly, we see very plainly that she does not love him. She is not led by affection, but driven by fear into his toils.

If Richardson could have drawn an amiable man (which he took care to show that he could not by writing Sir Charles Grandison), it would much have added both to the moral and pathetic effect, to have represented her affections as deeply engaged to Lovelace. Tell me, my dear friend, why is it so much easier to draw a fine female character than an interesting and excellent man? Richardson himself has Clarissa, Clementina, Emily (I don't reckon Harriet Byron, because I don't like her), and not one producible man to set against them. Miss Edgeworth is nearly in the same predicament; so are Charlotte Smith and Miss Burney. Indeed, I scarcely know one *héros de roman*, whom it is possible to admire, except Wallace in Miss Porter's 'Scottish Chiefs.'

Apropos of criticism, I was lately looking over the poems of an old friend of my father's, Mr. Thomas Warton (the laureate), and I there found, to my great astonishment, an ode which I should, from internal evidence, have pronounced at once to have been written by Walter Scott. It is called 'The Grave of King Arthur.' Read it; it is well worth looking for. Read it, and you will find there all the peculiarities and all the beauties of the Border Minstrel — his locality, his chivalry, his versification, and his style. You will there find too, or I am much mistaken, the very ideas and imagery of the finest part of 'The Lay,' Deloraine's visit to Melrose; and, if you are fond

of comparative criticism, you will be amused to trace the *decadence* from the grand and sublime agents and objects of Warton, his King Henry and King Arthur, with the gigantic armour and the gifted Kaliburn, to the old dead wizard, the moss trooper, and the Book of Choice Magical Receipts of Walter Scott. Oh, how much he has lowered it! You will find, too, the first draught of the minstrel;—and all this vast source of imitation is comprised in an ode of four pages! What would the critics, who accuse me of imitating Mr. Scott, say, if *I* did so? They will soon have an opportunity to admonish again, for 'Blanch' is out—out and I have not sent her to you! The truth is, my dear Sir William, that there are situations in which it is a duty to give up all expensive luxuries, even the luxury of offering the little tribute of gratitude and friendship; and I had no means of restraining papa from scattering my worthless book all about to friends and foes, but by tying up my own hands from presenting any, except to two or three very near relations. I have told you all this because I am not ashamed of being poor, and because perfect frankness is in all cases the most pleasant as well as the most honourable to both parties.

I must now bid you adieu, my dear friend, though my letter may probably wait a few days for a frank. Pray let me hear soon. We all join in best wishes for many happy years to you and yours.

Ever most gratefully and affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bath.*

Bertram House, Dec. 31, 1812.

My dear Sir William,

I won't detain you with any comments upon your mistake with regard to my affection for Lord

Grey, against whom I happen to have a very particular spleen, but pass on at once to 'Clarissa,' the grand object of your last delightful letter. Nothing in the world can stand against your wit, when you choose to make use of that powerful artillery; therefore I—having made battle as long as I possibly could for that 'Champion of Dames,' Mr. Richardson—shall certainly think proper to capitulate at discretion; or (to lower my metaphor a little) having defended my master's meat from your attacks as long as possible, I shall e'en sit quietly down and pick a bit with you. I quite agree with you as to the Harlowes, young and old; the vile and improbable plot; the disgusting means by which it is brought about; and the abominable folly, or worse than folly, of supposing chastity anything extraordinary; and I am not quite sure that I do not partly agree with you as to Clarissa's character. If she had been as prosperous as Sir Charles Grandison she would have been as insupportable; as it is, her piety, her resignation, her mental chastity throw a veil over all but her virtues.

I once knew a little of a lady who professed to make Clarissa her rule of life. She was, as you may imagine, a mere piece of clockwork; said her prayers, ordered dinner, walked, talked, read good books, and scolded the servants to the instant. I dare say she could have set the sun, if he had happened to go astray in his declination. This good lady was, to the unspeakable misery of all concerned, a wife and a mother; but of all human beings she had most decidedly the outward and visible marks of "ancient virginity." Hogarth's 'Old Maid of a Frosty Morning' was the image of her, mind and body. As to Sir Charles Grandison himself, he is a man of marble, or rather a man of snow; just like the companions of

Laila in Mr. Southey's 'Thalaba'—snow-people, who walk and talk, and eat and drink, and do everything but feel: and yet this composition of frost is always deploring his unfortunate sensibility! If I had lived in those days and been honoured by his acquaintance, I should certainly have been minded to give him a hearty pinch, to find whether he really was made of flesh and blood; or to bend him up and down, to discover whether he had a poker driven through him. That Sir Charles is really my horror. And yet the thing the most approaching to nature in all Richardson (at least in all that I have read of him, for 'Pamela' I have never seen) is the character of Emily Jervois in that very book. I like her better than Clementina, whom the worthy author chose to degrade so unnecessarily by first of all making her follow that bewitching snow-man to England, and then give a sort of promise to marry that other stick of Italian growth, the Count of Belvedere. Her only proper place of refuge was a nunnery.

Perhaps I am not sufficiently versed in the symptoms of madness, but I must confess Dr. Warton's praise of Clementina, in his delightful Commonplace Book on Pope, has always appeared to me greatly exaggerated. How is it possible to compare it with the touching frenzy of Lear, where every word goes so directly to the heart of every one endued with human feeling?

God bless you, my dear and ever-kind friend! I believe I may now wish to you and to all you love a happy new year and many of them.

Your obliged and affectionate,

M. R. MITFORD.

CHAPTER VII.

Letters for 1813.

To Dr. Mitford, *Star Office, Temple Bar.*

Bertram House, Jan. 1, 1813.

Nothing can exceed the kindness and goodness of Mr. and Mrs. Perry.* Ah! they do not know what a stupid useless animal they would be plagued with for an inmate. I have really some scruples of conscience about accepting their invitation: at all events, I cannot go "for some weeks." Marmy† is quite well, and in excellent glee, and very high favour; he has grown quite fond of me. I am more glad of the news about Will P—— than anything I have heard for these hundred years; more glad even than I was at the success of Mr. Coleridge's play.‡ I hope we shall see him when you return. It would be quite refreshing to have a little of his conversation, after being condemned to keep company with the people hereabouts.

I am very grateful indeed for the French papers, which will be a great amusement to me. I envied you your night at the play on Wednesday; for though they

* The editor of the 'Morning Chronicle.'

† Marmion, another greyhound.

‡ 'The Remorse,' which was acting at the time with great success.

are both *naughty*,* they are, I think, two of the best pieces on the English stage; and Mrs. Jordan's Nell is next to her country girl. Did you ever see Mrs. Abingdon in Miss Prue? If you go to Watlington, you will have as fine a fellow in my Lord Marmion as ever was seen, and in as beautiful condition. Peter is a very nice lad and very fond of them. I am very glad to find you are convinced of my prudence in looking under the bed. I dare say, if the rogue had not been taken, he would have made the tour of the house and rifled every pocket in it. God bless you, my own dearest pet!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham*.

Bertram House, Feb. 22, 1813.

Let me begin by condoling with you, my dear friend, upon your press-correcting miseries. Oh, I am well entitled to condole with you; for I have often suffered the same calamity. It is true that my little fop of a learned printer has in his employ *three* regularly bred Oxonians, who, rather than starve as curates, condescend to marshal commas and colons, and the little magical signs which make the twenty-four letters, as compositors; and it is likewise true, that the aforesaid little fop sayeth—nay, I am not sure that he doth not swear—that he always gives my works to his *best hands*. Now, as it is not mannerly for a lady to say "you fib," I never contradict this assertion, but content myself with affirming that it is morally impossible that the aforesaid hands can have that connec-

* 'Love for Love' and 'The Devil to Pay,' with Mrs. Jordan as Miss Prue and Nell.

tion with a head which is commonly found to subsist between those useful members. Some great man or other—Erasmus, I believe—says that "Composing is Heaven, preparing for publication Purgatory, and correcting for the press"—what must not be mentioned to "ears polite." And truly, in my mind, the man was right. From these disasters I have, however, gained something:—"Sweet are the uses of adversity;" and my misfortunes have supplied me with an inexhaustible fund of small charity towards my unfortunate brethren, the mal-printed authors. For, whereas I used to be a most desperate and formidable critic on plural or singular, definite and indefinite, commas and capitals, interrogations and apostrophes, I have now learnt to lay all blunders to the score of the compositor, and even carry my Christian benevolence so far that, if I meet with divers pages of stark staring nonsense (and really one does meet with such sometimes), instead of crying, "What a fool this man must be—I'll read no more of his writing!" I only say "How unlucky this man has been in a compositor! I can't possibly read him until he changes his printer."

I am now going to talk about Marmontel. Yes, I have read his charming *Mémoires;* and, like you, I have been delighted with them—with the first three volumes, I mean, and most particularly with the first; as to the fourth, it is all about that sickening Revolution, and I did not read it. The picture of innocence, simplicity, and affection contained in the first volume is enchanting. Oh! how often must Marmontel have regretted those happy days!

Biography is my favourite reading; and of all kinds of biography—next to that of letters connected by a slight narrative, like Mason's Gray and Hayley's

Cowper, which is undoubtedly the very best—self-biography is the mode which I prefer. Much egotism there must be, and some vanity there generally is; but the deuce is in it if an author can praise himself so much as his biographer can praise him; and then the said biographer is commonly as full of egotism and self-praise as if he was writing his own memoirs; so that we only get two egotists and two self-flatterers instead of one. Still more tiresome is another style of biography—the dignified style, forsooth! which treats the subject *en prince;* talks of a Scottish professor as if he were arbiter of Europe; and, after discussing all the topics on which he may have happened to write, and all the authors who have written on them before or since, throws his birth or marriage into a note, as too undignified for history, and takes leave of his reader and his subject without having given the former any more insight into the latter's character or manners than a foreigner would obtain of the Regent from an introduction on a levée day. Oh give me rather the honest prattle of Cumberland, or the party rage of Madame Roland, than such mockery as this, though Dugald Stewart be the writer and Robertson the subject.

What says Bath of 'Rokeby?' But Bath, I suppose, is, as to literature, politics, and fashion, the echo of London. Be it what it may, I am very happy that you have arrived there, both because it brings us a step nearer, and because it so comfortably rids you of the horrors of solitude. "*O, la Solitude est une belle chose; mais il faut avoir quelqu'une à qui l'on puisse dire, La Solitude est une belle chose!*" Good-night, my dear friend. We shall meet again, upon paper, in a day or two.

Tuesday evening.—About solitude we were talking,

and you mention Zimmerman, whose name appertains as naturally to solitude as mustard to boiled beef (this simile of mine is rather John Bull-ish—not very elegant or lady-like, but you'll excuse it), though I must do the mustard the justice to say that, in point of piquancy, there can be no comparison, inasmuch as that goodly author beareth a much stronger resemblance to water-gruel. I have, in truth, a complete dislike to all those Swiss and German sentimentalists—Zimmerman, Lavater, Rousseau, and the whole tribe. Of Rousseau, indeed, I am no very competent judge, for I stuck fast in the first volume of 'Julie,' laid it down, and have never been tempted to take it up again. And yet I read it under circumstances of great advantage to an author. Stolen fruit, you know, is always the sweetest; and it was a forbidden book. And, moreover, I was exactly at the soft, silly, lackadaisical age (sixteen or thereabouts) when a doleful love ditty commonly produces such a storm of tears and sighs in the female bosom. My flinty heart was, however, as impracticable as a brick wall, and so, thank God! it has continued.

As regards Lavater I am a stanch adherent to the physiognomy of nature, though I do not allow him to be her interpreter. By the physiognomy of nature, I mean, of course, that perception of character and temper in the human countenance which leads one almost immediately to like or dislike the possessor—which attracts or repels. In this sense we are all physiognomists. Children are great physiognomists, and, to a certain extent, greyhounds are physiognomists likewise. Expression is such an undefinable thing that it is scarcely possible to describe it; though without it there is, to my mind, no beauty. Perhaps the keen, dark eye, the aquiline nose and the flexible, marked, and slightly contracted brow,

smiling lips and dimpled chin, all the upper part of the face sense, and all the lower part sweetness, answers most completely to my idea of the standard of expression in your sex. "Such a man, cousin, with a good leg and a good foot, might win any woman in the world —if he could gain her good-will."

Mamma desires her kindest regards, and so would papa, who is coursing in Oxfordshire.

Pray let me hear soon, and believe me ever,

Your most grateful and affectionate friend,

M. R. MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Temple.*

Bertram House, March 31, 1813.

Before I forget it, my dear boy, I must remind you to bring poor old Mudder* a bottle of Russia oil to cure her grey locks. We have had a sweet walk to-day. You often accuse me of never being pleased with the weather, so I would have you observe, that this present 31st of March, 1813, has been and is exactly the very day that I should like from the first of January to the last of December; rain enough to lay the dust; wind enough to dry the rain; and sun enough to warm the wind. Take care not to tell me again that I never was pleased with the weather an hour together in my life. Everything is a month earlier this year than last—not to mention the wood anemones. Beloved, we have actually five asparagus up in the garden. I found one last night, and Peter the rest this morning.

I have the whole week's diversion laid out. To-morrow I shall go violeting; Friday I shall pick wood anemones;

* Herself.

and Saturday I shall eat asparagus. Oh, how I do miss my ittey boy! I shall do very well without the French play; though I have again changed my mind about mine,* which will be in five acts instead of three, and runs much more risk of being too long than too short. My favourite character is a little saucy page who was not in the French play; and who is, I think, almost a new character on the English stage. We have, it is true, pages in abundance, but then they commonly turn out to be love-lorn damsels in disguise. Now mine is from first to last, a *bonâ fide* boy during the whole play. God bless you! I am all anxiety to hear about the Reviews. Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, April 11, 1813.

I did not ask you to *send* me your pamphlet, my dear friend; I asked you to *bring* it. And now, since I must be a desolate, despairing damsel during the whole year, and stroll about the fields shedding melodious tears for the absence of my faithful *lovyer*, I must even go to London and get it myself. I can procure it at Longman's.

Talking of Longman's, I must tell you how citizen booksellers feed dogs. One of the partners (Mr. Rees) in that Leviathan firm made some time since a most earnest application to papa for a cast greyhound, anything would do; but he had passed a week in Ettrick Forest with Walter Scott, who took him out coursing every day, and he must have a greyhound. Papa

* 'The King of Poland,' the first play she attempted.

promised to consider the case, came home, told me the story, and forgot it. It so happened, however, towards the end of the season, that he had a most beautiful young dog, excellently well bred, in the highest condition, very playful and affectionate, with only one fault in the world—he could not run. I do verily believe had he been destined to catch a mouse, in fair running the mouse would have beaten him. What was to be done with poor Madoc? for so, an' please ye, he was called. He was a beautiful picture, but as a greyhound he was worse than as a picture; for there he had two faults—he ate and he was taxed. "I'll send him to Paternoster Row," said papa—and to Paternoster Row he was sent. In spite of his faults, poor Madoc was a favourite of mine, and when papa went to town I begged him to call and see him. He did so, and was immediately conducted into one of the warerooms, where Madoc, on a whole truss of straw, had taken the place of lumber much duller than himself—of Scotch metaphysics, of Grub Street poetry, and of politics from the King's Bench. There he sat in state, with a huge platter containing all the odds and ends of the kitchen, a sort of *olla podrida* of beef, mutton, and veal, on one side of him, and an immense pan of *pease soup* on the other. If Mr. Rees should ever chance to discover that he cannot run, I design to lay the fault entirely on this pease soup.

Is not Mr. C—— a Reformer? How catching is that talk about Reform! It so flatters one's vanity, to set about mending the State. It looks so much wiser to find fault than to praise; and it is so much easier to boot! Then, though one only takes one's arguments from the last newspaper, all hearers, from courtesy or fellow-feeling, give one credit for originality; and many

persons, to my certain knowledge, have got a very pretty sort of country reputation for cleverness, from no other source; whilst, as is well known, you, the opposers of innovation, never condescend to argue at all. In short, to say nothing of the better enthusiasm which the very sounds of purity and freedom never fail to excite in the breasts of the young and ardent, there are so many paltry passions and petty vanities which one dignifies by the name of love of reform, that I must end as I began, with saying that I scarcely know whether I am a Reformer or not. One thing is certain, if not a Reformer I am nothing; for I have as pretty a contempt for the ministers as my whiggish papa; and as comfortable a dislike to the Whigs as my ministerial uncle.

What shall we talk of now? Of something as opposite to politics as night to day, or as music to discord; we will talk of the nightingales. They are not come yet, though this warm weather would certainly have brought them, if I had not sent to put them off till we had the happiness of seeing you. Now that I have no hopes of this pleasure I shall write them an invitation directly. I am not like Mrs. Opie's Glenmurray; I can eat grapes if I can't get pineapple. Besides which I want the nightingales to console me. I shall not hear many of their sweet notes this year; for when papa, who is now in London, returns home, he will take me almost immediately back with him to fulfil my engagements in town and the neighbourhood. Dear mamma, who is quite well again, Heaven be thanked, will remain here, and here you will be so good as to direct your next letter, because I am going to more than one house, and am not yet certain whether I shall first proceed to Tavistock House to Mrs. Perry,

or to Fulham, to Mrs. Wilson. Good-night, and God bless you!

Ever affectionately yours,
M. R. MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

Bertram House, Sunday,
April 12, 1813.

I cannot imagine, my own dearest, how it is possible that the delay in delivering the basket can have occurred. It must have originated in London, for Peter not only paid for booking it, but saw it put into the coach and set off for town. I always said, and you always were in a passion when I did say it, that the Reading coach people, the Reading post people, and Reading altogether, was the most careless, blundering, unpunctual town ever heard of. Nine times out of ten there is some mistake in the parcels, backwards or forwards. If this present blunder tormented you, it did the same by me. I don't think I have had a comfortable night's sleep since I finished writing that foolish play. I never will write another line in my life. Pray have you sent a draft to Kirk? His bill is 10*l.* 19*s.* 5½*d.* Don't neglect this; it would be a shocking folly to have it nearly doubled by law expenses. My lovely Mia is as fat as a pig; but she has almost eat up the raspings, and I don't know what to get for her. God bless you, my best beloved darling! I have got such loves of flowers, and want nothing but my boy.

Ever most fondly yours,
M. R. M.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, June 27, 1813.

Am I not better than good, my dear friend, to answer so soon? After all your hard names too; calling me "Echo" and "Jacobite," and God knows what! If it had not been for the "Mary" in the conclusion I should certainly have broken my heart. It is very true that I have been running about more than usual this spring—first of all for a month in town, and since at the house of a friend in the forest for Ascot races; but it is equally true that I told you mamma would remain here, and forward any letter from you, my dear, lazy, delightful correspondent.

I take it for granted that you are acquainted with Mr. Moore, that "abridgment of all that is pleasant in man." I never saw him till this spring, when he dined frequently at Tavistock House.* I am quite enchanted with him. He has got a little wife (whom I did not see), and two little children, and they are just gone into Wales, where he intends to finish a great poem on which he is occupied. It is a Persian tale, and he says it will be his fault if it is not a fine work, for the images, the scenery, the subject, are poetry itself. How his imagination will revel among the roses, and the nightingales, and the light-footed Almé!

I saw Mrs. Opie only once during my stay in town, though we afterwards exchanged calls without meeting. She looks, I think, very ill—thinner, paler, and much older, but was, as she always is, very kind and pleasant. I saw something else, too, that reminded me of my dear Sir William. It was not your pamphlet, which for want of going into *The Row*, and a proper title

* Mr. Perry's, in Tavistock Square.

to send for it by, I did not see; but your beautiful landscape, well placed and looking to much advantage in the great room of the Exhibition. I thought the paintings this year extremely good, especially Wilkie's 'Blindman's Buff' and Turner's 'Frosty Morning;' but everything was thrown into the background by Sir Joshua's exhibition. Though even there I was partially disappointed—not in the general effect, but in some of the cried-up pictures. What, for instance, can be so uninspired as the celebrated portrait of Mrs. Sheridan as St. Cecilia? The 'Death of Cardinal Beaufort' by no means answered my expectations. There are some scenes in poetry which painting had better let alone; and this is one of them. It seems to me, too, that the painter has mistaken his moment. "Lord Cardinal, if thou think'st on Heaven's bliss, hold up thy hand"—make signal of thy hope: "He dies, and makes no sign." Now the expression indicated by these words is despair—chill, hopeless, fixed despair; whilst in the countenance of the picture nothing can be traced but the contortions of bodily pain. It is very impertinent in me, who know nothing of painting, to make these observasions to any one—especially to you, who know so much.

Papa is in town, but he will, I am sure, and so shall I, be delighted with your work on natural history.

My dear mamma is quite well, and desires her kindest compliments.

Ever, my dear sir,

Your obliged and affectionate friend,

M. R. M.

[Lady Charles Aynsley died about this time, after a hopeless illness of eight months. Miss Mitford ob-

serves, in alluding to the circumstance, "The more I grieve for this dear and lovely woman the more I feel that the power of regulating the passions—even the best and kindest affections of our nature—is the choicest gift of Heaven."]

To DR. MITFORD, *Somerset Coffee House, Strand.*

July 9, 1813.

I do hope, my own dear love, that you returned to London yesterday, and that you have been actively employed to-day in getting money for the taxes. If not you must set about it immediately, or the things will certainly be sold Monday or Tuesday. Heaven knows when the other affair will take place; I dare say very soon. There is nothing but resolution and activity that can make amends for the time that has been wasted at Bocking. The only thing there that can give us any pleasure is the prospect of a provision for our poor dear Mary.* As to the will, it cannot be proved; for the creditors would be idiots indeed if they did not seize *all* the money. I am sure my uncle would not allow it to be so disposed of. There is no fear but the Duke will take care of the younger children. Pray have *you* ever any chance of being paid? I must confess the prospect appears to me more remote than ever. I can't think how the money could so accumulate in Mr. Wilson's hands. I thought it had been appropriated to liquidating the debts. 'Tis a sad juggle; and I should have said I thought so if we had been totally uninterested in it. I hope you will take no part in securing the money to the children; you have

* Her cousin, the sister of Lady Charles Aynsley.

nothing to do but to try and recover your own. 'Tis a sad juggle! How much I should have liked to see London illuminated. I should have routed you out to go with me, and cured your headache, as I did at Ascot; though I do not pretend to say or to think that both these ailments originated from the same cause. Indeed, I dare say you do not just now take wine enough. God bless you, my best beloved own darling! All the pets send love and duty; and I send kisses and God blesses out of number to my own dear boy.

Ever and ever most fondly his own,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, August 2, 1813.

Mrs. Wilson insisted on retaining me at Fulham for some time after my cousin left it, and as I had cheated her out of my promised visit in the spring, I could not refuse to stay and accompany her to that fête of fêtes, the having attended which ought, I think, to serve as penance and absolution for all our sins, past, present, and to come.* Oh, my dear Sir William, how happy were you in your Devonshire paradise ("Blest if your happiness you knew"), with trees adorned only with their own green leaves, no illuminations but the glowworms, no firework but a falling star! whilst we poor unfortunates had our eyes put out with lamps and dust, and were frightened to death with Mr. Congreve's

* This fête took place on the 20th of July, in celebration of the battle of Vittoria. The Duke of York was in the chair, and the Dukes of Clarence, Kent, Sussex, Cambridge, and Gloucester were among the guests.

rockets. I had the happiness, in the midst of this crowd, of getting a good sight of Madame de Staël—Madame de Staël, who was almost as much followed in the Gardens as the Princess, and is nearly as much courted in the metropolis as the illustrious stranger whose place she so luckily came to supply—the Cossack.

Oh, what a thing is English popularity! I might have seen a good deal of her if I had made any stay, as my dear friend would fain have had me, at Tavistock House, for she is an old friend of Mrs. Perry's. But, to tell the truth, I am not very ardently her admirer. Her learned works are too deep and too shallow; her morality seems to me of a nature to *demoralize* the world; and her novels want that likeness to nature in which the beauty of fiction consists. To counterbalance all this, she has nothing but eloquence—the eloquence both of passion and of style; and of this she certainly has a great deal, almost as much perhaps as Rousseau, whom she greatly resembles in talents and singularity.

Did you ever hear a curious mistake made by Dr. Parr relative to her 'Corinne?' A gentleman was speaking to the Doctor in high praise of Lady Davy, but could not prevail on him to like her. "I see nothing uncommon in Lady Davy," said the Doctor; "nothing but affectation, which is common enough." "Nothing in Lady Davy!" cried the gentleman. "Nothing in Lady Davy!" was echoed round; "why, Doctor, she is a perfect Corinne!" "No, no, no, sir; I did not mean that; I never heard anything improper of her ladyship—nothing so bad as that either!" returned Dr. Parr, thinking of none but the Grecian Corinna, and never probably having heard of her modern namesake, or her inventress Madame de Staël. All the company laughed at the mistake; and yet to my

mind it was not so ridiculous, for what was Corin*na* that Corin*ne* is not?

Your obliged and affectionate,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

ALL THAT I CAN RECOLLECT OF AN ELEGY WRITTEN ON THE DEATH OF MY POOR DEAR OLD MANX, SHORTLY AFTER HE DIED, OCTOBER, 1813. GOD BLESS HIM, POOR OLD DARLING! HE WAS THIRTEEN YEARS OF AGE, AND HAD ALWAYS LIVED WITH ME.

And is all sense, all feeling gone,
  All sign of latent life;
The panting breast, the feeble moan,
  The gentle spirit's strife,
When love with weakness struggled sore
To lick his mistress' hand once more?
Yes! all is o'er; poor Manx is dead,
  And the infrequent tear
From eyes not prone to weep is shed
  On Manx's humble bier;
O'er him, the faithful, fond, and mild,
Though long beloved, by love unspoiled.
Yet not untimely was his death,
  For age had blanched his hair;
And his weak form and quivering breath
  Were kept alive by care;
Such care as rears the new-fall'n lamb
When biting frosts have killed its dam.

And well had he such care deserved,
  When age and sickness fell,
From her whom in his youth he served
  So faithfully and well.
From life's first cry to death's last moan
No other mistress had he known;
And though so weak his trembling frame,
Yet still his step to meet me came,
  His eye was turned on me;
And more I loved as more I feared,
And every care the more endeared.

Witness of Friendship's social talk,
  Of sweet affection's praise,
Linked in with every pleasant thought,
That hope inspired or memory taught.
O few and mournful flowers have stood
  November's blasts and dew,
Yet one last rose, sad southernwood,
  Pale lavender and rue,
Myrtle and cistus' balmy breath,
Shall sweeten thy dear corse in death!
O harsh and broken is the lyre
  And all untuned the string,
And yet, though quenched the minstrel fire,
  Still, still of Manx I sing;
And long the rude lament shall swell
For him who loved and served so well.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Nov. 10, 1813.

The occasion of this present infliction, my dear friend, proceeds from my desire to vent on some ***sympathetic soul***, some ***kindred spirit***, three feelings with which I am at present brim-full—admiration, anger, and perplexity. In the first I am sure you will sympathize most cordially, for it is excited by Burns—by Burns, the sweetest, the sublimest, the most tricksy poet who has blest this nether world since the days of Shakespeare! I am just fresh from reading Dr. Currie's four volumes and Cromek's one, which comprise, I believe, all that he ever wrote; and I cannot imagine how I can have wasted my admiration on the little living, and disregarded the mighty dead in the way that I have hitherto done. To make it worse, I had read Dr. Currie's 'Life of Burns' before, when I was about twelve or thirteen, and yet I had almost forgotten him. If I forget him again "may my right hand forget its cunning!" Have you lately read

that delightful work? If you have not, pray do, and tell me if you do not admire him—not with the flimsy, lackadaisical praise with which certain gentle damsels bedaub his 'Mountain Daisy' and his 'Woodlark,' and talk and sing of the rustic bard as the compeer of Bloomfield,* and Stephen Duck, and Mrs. Leapor; but with the strong and manly feeling which his fine and indignant letters, his exquisite and original humour, his inimitable pathos, must awaken in such a mind as yours. Oh, what have they to answer for who let such a man perish! I think there is no poet whose works I have ever read, who interests one so strongly by the display of personal character contained in almost everything he wrote (even in his songs) as Burns. Those songs are for the greater part nearly his best productions; the very best is undoubtedly 'Tam O'Shanter.' The humour, the grandeur, and the fancy of that poem will never be equalled. What a pity it is that Burns did not follow the advice of my late excellent correspondent and adviser, Lord Woodhouselee, and give the world some more tales on that model! His versatility and his exhaustless imagination would have made it easy to him.

By-the-way, my dear Sir William, does it not appear to you that versatility is the true and rare characteristic of that rare thing called genius—versatility and playfulness? In my mind they are both essential.

* The name of Bloomfield is still remembered. Stephen Duck was a thresher who wrote verses, became a beef-eater, was afterwards ordained, and by the patronage of Queen Caroline preferred to a living in Suffolk. He eventually went mad, and drowned himself in 1756; but survives in an Epigram of Swift's. Mary Leapor, the most meritorious of these three self-educated poets, is now quite forgotten. She was the daughter of a gardener in Northamptonshire; who, in spite of her want of education, wrote two volumes of very tolerable verses. She died in 1746.

All that is great and eminent in past ages can boast of them—Shakespeare, Dryden; ay, and, when we look at 'Comus' and 'L'Allegro,' even our solemn Milton. As for our goodly Laureate and his fraternity, if they have them not, *tant pis pour eux;* it will not invalidate my proposition. Whenever one of the species of animal called an authoress admires she must write verses—*c'est la règle;* and whatever I write you are doomed to read—*c'est la règle aussi!* So prepare yourself for a dose of bad poetry in the form of a sonnet. All sonnets are something alike; and you will already have guessed, what I do not scruple to say in dispraise of this one, that it is as unlike Burns as possible. It is indeed the very semblance of an Italian sonnet; so that it seems to me as if I must have composed it in Italian and then turned it into English, *concetti* and all. Now for it—

SONNET.

Burns! not the fairy songster's painted wings,
Shaking from tiny plumes Columbian dews,
Can match the changeful splendour of thy muse:
Now melting tenderness resistless flings
Delightful sorrow; now quick flashing springs
The patriot glow; now wit the smile renews;
Now love with fancy blends his gayest hues,
And reason's self lies captive while he sings.
Idol and victim of a heartless train,
Bold was thy rhyme, impetuous, sparkling, clear!
Not Ariosto's, no, nor Shakespeare's strain
Could sooner raise or sooner quell the tear:
Only one tear thy magic cannot chain;—
Burns! Burns! for thee it falls! thee on thy bier.

[*Exit Admiration—enter Anger.*

It is a terrible confession for a *gentle damsel* to make, that she is in a passion; and yet so it is, and I

cannot help it, and scold I must or I shall never get out of it. For you must know there are only two female resources in these cases: the best and quietest crying; but lack-a-day and woe is me! I never can cry except in poetry. The other is scolding, and as the offender happens to be out of my reach, you are likely to have the benefit upon paper of what I would gladly bestow upon him *vivâ voce*. My dear Sir William, my Marmion has won the cup at Ilsley and been cheated out of it. Think of that, my dear friend! Won the cup upon *three legs* and been cheated out of it! Think of that! Won the cup upon three legs and been cheated out of it by a caricature of man—an animal as crooked in mind as in person! Think of that, my dear friend! Oh, that I were but a man! Cheated by a humpback! Think of that! My poor Marmy, my dear Marmy, my pretty Marmy, oh, that I were but a man! Don't you think that the monks were true sages, who refused to admit into their fraternity a member who had any corporeal defect? What simpletons the Ilsley club were not to follow this excellent example! I have known many charming deformed women, but I never knew a man of the sort good for anything in my life. Pope, for instance, what an animal was he! Always abusing lords *en masse*, and courting them individually; always talking like generosity and acting like avarice; a flattery-hunter, a legacy-hunter, a detractor, and a dupe. "He's Knight of the Shire, and represents them all." The only bearable hunchback of my acquaintance is Richard the Third. Shakespeare's Richard the Third.

Have you read Mrs. Opie's 'Tales of Real Life?' I have only seen the first volume, and it is much better than 'Temper.' She is always powerful in pathos.

But why will she meddle with lords and ladies? Pray, is not your neighbour, Lady Boringdon,* an authoress? I have heard of two novels in high repute (but which I have not read), 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Pride and Prejudice,' ascribed to her. The prettiest thing of the sort I have read lately is Miss Burney's 'Traits of Nature.'

Kindest compliments from all.

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

[A letter of Sir William Elford, dated Nov. 30, contained the following riddle which he had composed:—

In gorgeous apparel I'm usually dress'd,
Yet no one more humble can be;
For though in fine parties I'm e'er so much press'd
The room's lowest place is for me.

Although neither quarrels nor bickerings I seek
I'm oppressed by the great and the small;
And whether I'm valiant, submissive, or weak,
I'm sure to be worsted in all.

W. E.]

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House. Dec. 3, 1813.

I am sorry to say, my dear friend, that you will have no argument on waltzing from me, and that for a very simple reason; namely, that I am quite of your opinion. I cannot even imagine what the defenders of this most *un-English* dance can find to say for it. All that I have ever heard asserted in its favour has been the

* Miss Talbot, the wife of Lord Boringdon, afterwards Countess of Morley, was a very distinguished member of society, and an excellent amateur artist; but not quite equal to the production of 'Pride and Prejudice' or 'Sense and Sensibility.'

single ejaculation, "Prejudice!" which when pronounced in a contemptuous accent, with a becoming toss of the head, a curl of the lip, and a proper dilatation of the nostrils, has frequently a better effect in *dumb-founding* an adversary than all the argument of Demosthenes or the eloquence of Cicero. This magic word, however, astounds not me. The prejudice of opinion may frequently be wrong, but the prejudice of action is commonly right; and, right or wrong, the prejudice of modesty is always feminine.

In addition to the reasons which I suppose we have in common against this dance, I have a particular objection founded on the recollection which it always brings to my mind of a certain French dancing-master from whom I had the honour to learn it, and between whom and myself there subsisted an aversion as entire and reciprocal as ever two poor mortals were subject to. *His* reasons were pretty obvious; then, as well as now,

> On *my stout* pegs
> Moved native awkwardness with two left legs.

My causes of dislike were, his ill-humour and his coxcombry. It was his duty to scold me into something like grace, a task which he found impossible. It was my pleasure to make him look like a fool, which was the easiest thing in the world. Very often, indeed, he saved me the trouble, and showed himself off in the most delightful way imaginable, without any pains whatever on my part. I will give you an instance.

When I was about fourteen it pleased the fates, in the shape of Miss Rowden, to inflict on her unfortunate scholars the penance of acting a play interspersed with songs, at the breaking-up time, to conclude with a grand ballet; so that specimens might be afforded of the vast

improvement of her pupils to parents, uncles, guardians, grandmammas, and second cousins. It fell to my lot to speak the Prologue; and at the last grand dress rehearsal, just as I was advancing from behind the scenes for that purpose, I found myself arrested by the hands of Monsieur Denis, who declared himself shocked to death at finding me placed in a situation which required me to make a curtsey, but began forthwith to make the best of a bad business by placing me in the proper station to begin this important reverence. His design was to have a grand comprehensive *turning* curtsey, which should take in all the spectators at one sweep; and accordingly he placed me at an angle to the right, so ⟍, where I was to begin to sink; the sinking was to be completed straightways, so ___; and the rising accomplished at an equal angle to the left, so ⟋, thus describing the exact mathematical figure of a segment of a circle ⌒. This manœuvre was repeated at least twenty times to my great annoyance; poor Monsieur Denis scolding, fretting, and turning me about during the whole time. At last it came to a period somewhat abruptly by the entrance of our elocution master, a sour pedant of Oxford growth, who no sooner perceived the turning curtsey than he declared it absurd, and insisted on three distinct obeisances, in the playhouse fashion. This I did not fail to interpret to Monsieur Denis, who at last ceasing the revolution of my person exclaimed, "*Trois révérences! Vous! la plus grosse! la plus lourde! la plus gauche! Trois révérences! Ah! pour le coup c'en est trop. Tenez, monsieur,*"—but vain were his exclamations. He had no English—our orator no French; so at length they fairly betook themselves to exemplifying their respective theories in their own proper persons; the *maître d'éloquence* making

three bobs which were most decidedly of the neuter gender, neither bow nor curtsey; and the graceful Frenchman folding his hands before him, turning on his heel for a pivot, and making exactly the same teetotum-like reverence that he had vainly essayed to teach me; both talking all the time—the Englishman in a well-concerted harangue in his mother tongue, the dancing-master with equal fluency letting off "legs and wings and heads and feet" of sentences from his untired Gallic organs. Thrice did the one curtsey; thrice did the other bob. But at last the orator carried it by a triumphant majority. The French teacher alone voted for her countryman; and I made three curtseys in spite of my dancing-master.

I must not have you imagine that this, my first and last appearance on any boards, was in any tender tragedy or wicked comedy—anything which could by possibility inoculate our young imaginations with a love of the stage and its wit and its vanity. No, my dear Sir William, our performance was one which could never by any chance produce such an effect; it was neither more nor less than Miss Hannah More's dramatic homily, 'The Search after Happiness,' and was designed equally to mend our morals and improve our declamation. All our actresses, the indolent, the romantic, and the vain, were fitted with parts which touched their respective foibles; as to me, *it was so difficult to discover any fault in my charming composition* that I should without doubt have enacted the goodly dame if I had been a little less short, or the pattern shepherdess if I had been a little less ugly. As it was, they gave me the best of the worldly Misses in the shape of—of—of Cleora (to think that I should forget my own name!), and threw the Prologue and Epilogue into the bargain. I cannot say much for the moral effect of our

piece. Just before the play began, the lowly Maria fell into a sort of hysteric of fright, lamentation, and anger because she was not suffered to wear a diamond necklace which her aunt had brought for her adornment; and one of the *figurantes* happening to overset a mug of water, which was provided for this fit, just between Florella and me, the gentle shepherdess gave the poor monkey a slap on the face, and the learned Cleora scolded most volubly in the vulgar tongue. I cannot either say much for its historic excellence. What between fright and bashfulness, nothing seemed to go right;—one muttered—another squeaked—and a third sang all the spoken part to a tune of her own composing. We were regularly too high or too low; one did not know how to come on—nor another how to get off. We were always out of our places, and always went the more wrong the more we tried to get right.

Divers small accidents happened, too, in this eventful evening. A little brat who acted Maria's youngest child happened to tread on part of the peel of a lemon (which had been smuggled behind the scenes by the fair Euphelia for the benefit of her voice); this peel threw the poor child on her nose, and she instantly set up a cry that made the audience laugh, and threw the actors into irretrievable confusion. Then the identical *figurante* who overthrew the water contrived to stand before the curtain at the end of the play, and I was forced to send her off before I could speak the Epilogue; to say nothing of minor ills, such as Florella's marching about with a fan instead of a nosegay—Euphelia's dropping her glove—and my dropping two lines of the Prologue, which I'll venture to say no one missed except the prompter and the author. For the rest, our play went off exceedingly well; the few who were awake clapped

at the falling of the curtain, which awoke the sleepers, and they clapped likewise.

A thousand thanks, my dear sir, for your excellent riddle. I am quite delighted with it; it is just what an enigma should be—short, graceful, and witty; and, to say everything at once—one of those rare things, a happy trifle. A German gentleman in this neighbourhood ("What has he to do with my riddle?" Listen and you will hear)—a German gentleman here is, you must know, a most devoted sportsman. He has (as his wife told me about a month ago) shot five birds in seventeen years. Well, this gentleman was out shooting lately with a friend and his gamekeeper, and returning home, with plenty of game of his companion's killing but none of his own, they happened to find a hare sitting. "Oh," said Mr. L——, "pray let me have one shoot at that hare, jost as she is; I nebber have kill one hare in my life. Pray let me have one shoot." "It's terribly unsportsmanlike to shoot a hare sitting; but if you never did kill one——"—"Nebber, I assure you—except one that I thought I did hit; bot, as my broder fired too, I could not be sure, and it did get away." "Well, then, fire!" He fired, and the hare was actually killed! Judge, if you can, poor Mr. L——'s ecstasy. "I do tank you, Mr. B——; you are my very best friend. I do tank you for letting me shoot this hare. I do tank you, Mr. Gamekeeper; I most give you one dollar. Mr. B——, I most carry home this hare to show to my vife, or she will not belief me."

Well, my dear sir, your riddle is positively this nonsuch of a hare, for I never found any out in my whole life before—except one that I discovered in concert with a friend, who being famous for such things claimed the whole merit of it. Now as it is impossible that I

should be so much more dull than the dullest of the human species as never to have found out a good riddle, I take it for granted that all which have puzzled me were bad, and that this "carpet" of yours is the only standard enigma extant. By-the-way you are yourself a very admirable solver of conundrums. Who told you that Hunchback was a Welshman? The fact really is so, to the discredit of the Principality. His dog did not get the Cup, thank Heaven! though he cheated Marmion out of it.

Adieu, my dear sir. With the most perfect esteem,

Your obliged and affectionate friend,

M. R. M.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONTAINING LETTERS OF 1814.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Jan. 2, 1814.

DID I not threaten you with another letter, my dear Sir William, and a letter, too, about politics? In part only, however, will I redeem this my pledge. I will not launch upon the mighty ocean of politics, to which the name of *my friend* Napoleon usually leads, but content myself with assigning a few reasons for the mighty honour which this title confers upon him. If in this enumeration I should appear to chant forth my own praises, I cannot help it. Modesty is my friend—Discretion is my friend—but Truth is more my friend. In the first place, then, I am led to defend the Emperor Napoleon upon motives of mere benevolence and Christian charity, he having, as far as I can discover, no single advocate in the whole parish of Springfield except myself. The parson and the parson's niece, the curate, the clerk, and the schoolmaster are all stanch Anti-Gallicans. I verily believe they think the Church would fall and the graves would open at his approach, or the approach of any of his generation. Over and above his great and general wickedness, the crimes suited to "the master-fiend that Milton drew,"

they invest him with a kind of diabolical agency more immediate and particular; they entertain no doubt but he chops off old women's heads, steals bread and butter from their grandchildren, and carries about with him a collection of chains and thumbscrews for the use of the papas and mammas.

In the second place, I am prompted to take the poor Emperor's part by politeness and a wish to fulfil the duties of good neighbourhood. How can people possibly talk upon a subject on which they are all agreed? There is General F—— would have lived and died without saying a single good thing if he had not sharpened his wits on the whetstone of my liking to Buonaparte; and now this same wit cuts like an oyster-knife, curvets like a foundered horse, and shines like a dark lantern, by my assistance. Mr. N——, too, who is of a very dangerous apoplectic habit, would certainly have gone off the other day *by a retention of patriotism,* if I had not been at hand *to let* off his harangue, to which, poor gentleman, his audience, consisting of a circulating library full of tittering misses, seemed by no means disposed to listen.

Last of all, I am influenced by filial duty. Papa is mightily disposed to sleep after dinner—a very unwholesome recreation; and after trying all other stimulants both of action and conversation, backgammon, piquet, coaxing, romping, and scolding, I have found only one which is infallible, and that is a good hearty panegyric on the French Emperor. That rouses him instantly. He vituperates till all the blood mounts in his face; and his animal spirits are so set in motion that nothing short of a dose of laudanum would set him to sleep again. It even cures him in illness as well as exhilarates him in health; and I am quite sure he would rather dispense with food or fire than with the

Englishman's privilege of abusing his enemies. After these grand motives, I say nothing of the lesser ones of taste and opinion; the contrast between great captains and little kings; the establishment of religious liberty and the trial by jury; the patronage of the arts; and the excitement produced by sublime speeches, even though they be not always true, and by great actions, even though they be not always good.

My idol happens to be a dead one, and one whose like we shall never see again. My hero is Henry the Great. I am fresh from reading 'Les Mémoires de Sully,' which have afforded me more delight than any work I ever met with before. Can you tell me how it is that this great minister, who was evidently one of the most austere, sententious, unentertaining personages that ever lived, should have produced a book which, setting aside its admirable wisdom, is more amusing than any novel that ever was published? "The magic," say you, "is in the hero." Why, so I believe it is; but then how came Voltaire, who with all his faults contrives to be tolerably amusing, to dip his pen in snow when writing on the same subject? His 'Henriade' is a perfect avalanche—as heavy, as cold, and as overwhelming. Perhaps it might be possible to find a reason even for this. Voltaire was intimately acquainted with weakness, and vice, and folly; but he knew virtue and simplicity only *de réputation.* Hence he is quite at home in delineating the foibles and vanity of man, and miscarries only when treating of gentleness and grandeur. Truly the man succeeded a hundred times and failed but once: his is the best knowledge for an historian after all, especially for an historian in these days.

In this cold weather I do nothing but read; so I must talk to you of books, at the risk of being as dull

as a bookseller's catalogue. Oh, that tiresome Ossian! I never read much of it, and never mean to finish it; but if by any chance I should be fatally compelled to wade through that collection of "prose run mad," I am sure that I should be sickened of the sun and moon and stars—the hills and mists and torrents—that I should be fain to take refuge in the cellar or the dust-hole till "some sweet oblivious antidote had razed out all" remembrance of that burlesque of Nature—that work where ghosts are the only animated and fogs the only moveable things—that rhapsody more senseless than a Christmas pantomime, more impossible than an Arabian tale, and more mawkish than a modern tragedy. That Mrs. Grant should admire such trash certainly derogates not a little from her taste; but she is doubtless a woman of strong understanding and lively fancy, though not much improved by cultivation.

Have you read Southey's 'Life of Nelson?' It is a book not likely to attract your attention, knowing, as of course you do, all the principal circumstances of that heroic life literally by heart. But it is a work which I earnestly recommend to you as one of the most beautiful pieces of biography I ever met with; simple, interesting, and eloquent in the style; and carrying with it an air of candour and sincerity and right feeling worthy of the great and good man whom it celebrates. I cannot help recommending to you likewise to read Burns; *even though you should happen not to understand him.* All his prose, you know, is English, ay, and most excellent English to boot; and whenever his sweet muse takes her upward flight, she drops her Scotch pipes, and sings above the clouds in the language nearest to heaven. In plain prose, all his loftiest passages are pure English; and I am quite sure even

the humorous parts, which are the most Scotchified, would be quite within your reach without the disagreeable drudgery of a glossary, if you would but contrive to fancy so.

Jan. 4.

The to-morrow of the last line is now yesterday, and I am heartily glad that it is so, since I have now an opportunity of thanking you most warmly and sincerely for the very welcome letter which I have just received. How do you contrive to be always so charmingly entertaining? Pray send me your recipe and I will endeavour to put it in practice for your especial benefit. The waltzing verses are admirable.* I had seen them before, though only with the initials of the author. I hope it will not be long before your 'History of the Waltz' comes to give the *coup de grâce* to this detestable dance. In addition to the obvious reasons which all women ought to have for disliking it, I cannot perceive its much-vaunted graces. What beauty can there be in a series of dizzying evolutions, of which the wearisome monotony banishes all the tricksy fancies of the "poetry of motion," and conveys to the eyes of the spectators the idea of a parcel of teetotums set a spinning for their amusement? Well, peace be with them! I foresee that I shall soon be dulcified, and forgive the waltz for the sake of your prose and Sir

* The verses alluded to are the following, by Sir Henry Englefield: —

"What! the girl I adore by another embraced!
What! the balm of her breath shall another man taste!
What! pressed in the whirl by another's bold knee!
What! panting reclined on another than me!
Sir, she's yours; you have brushed from the grape its soft blue;
From the rosebud you've shaken the tremulous dew;
What you've touched you may take. Pretty waltzer, adieu!"

H. Englefield's verse, just as one forgives the great plague at Florence for the sake of Boccaccio's inimitable description.

I am quite charmed with the wise epigram. To reward you for it, I shall send you a punning epigram of Mr. Jekyll's which was given me by one of the counsel who are the subjects of the lines. You may have seen it before, but I will take the chance.

"THE NORTHERN CIRCUIT.

"To roar and bore of northern wights
The tendency so frail is,
That men do call these Northern Lights
Aurora Borealis."

Did you ever see such beautiful weather as we have had for the last week? I doubt, though, whether with you—so near the sea and in a milder climate—the weather may have deserved the epithet I have bestowed on it. Here the scene has been lovely beyond any winter piece I ever beheld; a world formed of something much whiter than ivory—as white, indeed, as snow—but carved with a delicacy, a lightness, a precision to which the massy, ungraceful, tottering snow could never pretend. Rime was the architect; every tree, every shrub, every blade of grass was clothed with its pure incrustations; but so thinly, so delicately clothed, that every twig, every fibre, every ramification remained perfect; alike indeed in colour, but displaying in form to the fullest extent the endless, infinite variety of Nature. This diversity of form never appeared so striking, as when all the difference of colour was at an end—never so lovely as when breaking with its soft yet well-defined outline on a sky rather gray than blue. It was a scene which really

defies description. The shubberies were slightly different; there some little modification of colour obtruded itself. The saffron-tinted leaves of the cut-leaved oak, fringed round with their snowy border—the rich seed-vessels of the sweet-briar, blushing through their light veil—and the flexible branches of the broom, weighed down, yet half unloaded of their fine burden, and peeping out in their bright verdure like spring in the lap of winter; all this was yesterday enchanting. To-day it is levelled and annihilated by the heavy uniformity of snow, of which just enough has fallen to spoil the walks, the roads, and the prospects. By-the-by, I ought not to quarrel with this fall, since it proves me weather-wise. A shoemaker came here yesterday, to whom, after paying his bill, I said, by way of saying something, "I think it looks like snow." "Yes, ma'am," said the man; "*rime aways does.*" . . . .

Your sincere and affectionate,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office.*

Tuesday morning, Jan. 19, 1814.

I am sorry to tell you, my dearest father, that Mr. Riley's clerk has just been here with a law paper utterly incomprehensible; but of which the intention is to inform you that, if the mortgage and interest be not paid *before next Monday*, a foreclosure and ejectment will immediately take place; indeed I am not sure whether this paper of jargon is not a sort of ejectment. We should have sent it to you but for the unfortunate circumstance of not knowing where you are, and being, therefore, obliged to write both to town and to Watlington. The clerk says

you ought to write to Mr. Riley and negotiate with him, and that if the interest had been paid no trouble would have been given. Whether the interest will satisfy them now I cannot tell. No time must be lost in doing something, as next Monday some one will be put in possession. Mr. Riley will be at home to receive your letter; and the clerk said he would direct his answer here. But as you can do no good at home, you had better tell him to send his letter to town. You must give him your address there, or else he will certainly direct to you here. If you want the paper, tell us where to send it to you.

We are just going to despatch Frank Alloway to Nettlebed with an open note to the Tulls, requesting them to send some one on to Watlington with a letter from hence. I hope you are in town, but there is unhappily no certainty. I shall likewise write to Hans Place, and by post to Watlington; so that not one moment's delay can be attributed to us. For God's sake don't let Chabannes* escape you!

Mamma joins in tenderest love. She is quite well. Heaven bless you!

Ever most fondly your own,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Jan. 23, 1814.

Pray, my dear Sir William, had you ever the honour of corresponding with a statue? If you have not, so much the greater your felicity at present; for such unhappily is my state. Last Monday week, the

* The Marquis de Chabannes, who had borrowed 1500*l.* from Dr. Mitford to bring out a patent lamp and never repaid him.

10th of January, 1814, new style (one ought to be particular on such occasions), as I was sitting at a moderate distance from the fire reading an extract from the Laureate's new-fangled ode, I felt a sudden congelation and stupefaction, first invading my brain, and then descending over my whole person, and had just perception enough remaining to discover that I was frozen. I behaved as all frozen people should do under the pressure of such a calamity—crept nearer the fire and placed myself in a commodious attitude to wait for a thaw; and there should have sat on (like the enchanted knight in Don Quixote who cried at certain intervals, "Patience, and shuffle the cards") except that I evinced sufficient symptoms of animation to be taken up and put to bed as if still alive. In that bed and by that same fire, and in that same attitude, have I continued ever since. To be sure with a wonderful deal of pains, I have just, as you may perceive, recovered imperfectly the use of my right hand; but as to my brains, those useful parts of my organization remain quite in an icy state, just as they were frozen by the united efforts of the frost and Mr. Southey; and what I shall do to *un*thaw them again (as our Mrs. Slipslop says) I cannot imagine—unless, indeed, somebody will be so good as to put me into a passion. . .

I can't think what our parrot-like poets mean by talking of the pleasures of the shade and cool grottoes and refreshing gales and all the vocabulary of refrigerants, which we have imported from Italy as they (the Italians) probably picked them up from the Oriental bards. We ought to sing the praises of the sun (so admired and admirable here in England for his rarity), and the substantial comforts of a good coal fire. Oh! I will never praise the winter again—never as long as

my teeth chatter and my fingers shake; and you know I contrive to make my teeth chatter and my fingers shake during the whole year, warm as well as cold.

I never can read Miss Edgeworth's works without finding the wonderful predominance of the head over the heart; all her personages are men and women; ay, and many of them very charming men and women; but they are all of them men and women of the world. There is too much knowledge of life, too much hardness of character—too great a proneness to find bad motives for good actions, too great a contempt for that virtuous enthusiasm, which is the loveliest rose in the chaplet of youth; and, to say all in one word, I never take up her volumes myself without regretting that they were not written by a man; nor do I ever see a very young girl reading them without lamenting that she will be let into the trick of life before her time.

I am perfectly well inclined to agree with you in laying the tiresome parts of her works to her prosing father, who is, Mr. Moore tells me, such a nuisance in society, that in Ireland the person who is doomed to sit next him at dinner is condoled with just as if he had met with an overturn, or a fall from his horse, or any other deplorable casualty. I can readily believe that such condolence is well bestowed, for I had the misfortune to hear him make a speech last year at a Lancasterian meeting. It was to introduce a motion of thanks to Miss Lancaster for having extended her brother's invention to hemming and sewing and stitching. Now this, you know, is ticklish ground for gentlemen, and nothing short of great brevity and simplicity could preserve it from becoming ludicrous. But Mr. E. was really so learned and so technical on the subject, and talked so much about the protection which he and

his family, particularly his daughter, had afforded to the invention, and the length of time that they had devoted to bringing the experiment to perfection, that I expected every moment to see him produce some Lancasterian chemise, and go on in the style of his prefaces—"See, ladies and gentlemen, this seam: it was sewed and felled and brought to Miss Edgeworth in the year 1809; she patronizes it only in the year 1813. Observe the respect which Miss Edgeworth pays to the public," &c. &c.

Good-night, my dear Sir William. Mamma says go to bed, and I obey.

March 20th.—My cold is gone, thank Heaven, the warm weather, and mamma's good nursing!

If you have Lord Orford's taste for silly stories I shall suit you exactly. A few days ago I had a visit from two ladies, the wife and sister of an officer of rank in Lord Wellington's army. Our visitors seated, and all compliments at an end, we asked of course after the Colonel; upon which the lady-wife produced a newly-received letter and read some entertaining military details. "But now," said she, suddenly stopping, "here is a passage we cannot understand." It ran as follows: "It is reported at head-quarters that, should the Allies reach Paris, Soult will play the part of General Monk." "Now what can that mean, Mrs. Mitford?" "Oh!" interrupted her sister, "it means of course *to run away. But who is General Monk?*"

On telling this story to my friend, Mr. Monk, by way of antidote to family pride, he told me that a lady to whom he once paid his addresses asked him if General Monk was not his father! "Luckily," continued Mr. M., glancing at his own sweet little wife, "luckily, I had not quite *popped the question.*"

I cannot yet answer your kind question as to the

chance of our meeting in town, though I do hope that nothing will intervene this spring to prevent my seeing *somewhere* the friend whom (I hope Lady Elford is not inclined to be jealous)—the friend whom I love so well and know so little. Papa teases me to go to town, and mamma helps him, and some London friends are so good as to join in the teasing; but mamma, dear mamma! is seldom well through the trying months of April and May, and I cannot bear to leave her. We are, too, expecting my uncle, who has just lost his wife; and I must not conceal from you that my disinclination to leave home is such, as (though it would render me a treasure in the East, where women are considered as utterly graceless without roots to their feet) occasions in this country (where they are at least transplantable vegetables) no small degree of scolding and consternation.

I do not know where I picked up this aversion to moving. By-the-way, Hume had it. He says, in one of his charming letters, that "when in Scotland he never wished to leave it—when in London he thought to live there—and now that he had got to Paris he believed he should stay there till he died." These are not the words, but the meaning. I dare say I got my laziness from that most amiable of philosophers, for I have always had a strong ambition to resemble great men, and having despaired of catching their virtues, have been wisely contented with adopting their faults. For instance, I could sit up all night drinking tea, like Dr. Johnson; and lie in bed all day dreaming sweet dreams, like Mr. Coleridge; and sit balancing and swinging on the hind legs of my chair, like Burns: and am, indeed, a villainous compound of every creature's worst. Now that I am in the train of abusing myself, I must not forget to prepare you for the deplorable

increase of my beautiful person. My dear friend, it is really terrible. Papa talks of taking down the doors, and widening the chairs, and new hanging the five-barred gates, and plagues me so, that any one but myself would get thin with fretting. But I can't fret; I only laugh, and that makes it worse. I beg you will get a recipe for *diminishing people,* and I will follow it; provided always it be not to get up early, or to ride on horseback, or to dance all night, or to drink vinegar, or to cry, or to be "*lady*-like and melancholy," or *not* to eat or laugh or sit or do what I like; because all these prescriptions have already been delivered by divers old women of both sexes, and constantly rejected by their contumacious patient.

I have told you that I cannot yet answer your most kind question, but in a few days I shall see papa, who is in town himself, and then I will write again. You will not, I suppose, leave Bath for a fortnight, and before that time you shall hear whether it will be in my power to see you in London.

Adieu, my dear sir. Mamma begs her kindest remembrances, and I am ever,

Your affectionate friend,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bath.*

Bertram House, April 5, 1814.

I think you must have guessed, my dear Sir William, when I talked of presumptuous hopes, or rather presumptuous wishes (I don't think I got so far as hopes), that I was impudent enough to desire, as "the mountain could not go to Mahomet, that Mahomet should come to the mountain;" in other words, that you would favour us with a visit here. It really requires some

assurance to ask you to come to such a place as this. It was a wilderness when you were here last; but now it is desolation more desolate—(I want some Italian superlatives to describe it by)—a sort of new ruin, half inhabited. The fact is that Mr. Elliott and his Chancery suit have soured even "the milk of human kindness" with which papa's bosom overflows. The gravel is covered with moss—the turf turned into pasture—the shrubberies into thickets. "Good enough for Elliott!" is the watchword of the house with all but my invariably excellent mamma, who never thinks of what other people deserve, but of what she can do for them. Her daughter, however, is by no means so good a Christian. She does not care if Mr. Elliott never tastes an asparagus or a strawberry without defraying the purchase-money, or smells a rose or a honeysuckle from any walks but the congenial alley of Covent Garden. Nay, she even caught herself thinking "Good enough for old Elliott" when the snow broke down her favourite acacia.

I suspect, however, that you have as much pleasure in pleasing as in being pleased—in making happy as in being happy; that in default of greenhouse plants (and our greenhouse is a real vegetable churchyard—a collection of dead stumps and withered leaves), you will be well content with cowslips and wood anemones; and instead of beaux and belles, will graciously accept the company of a whole flight of nightingales whom I have invited to meet you. And, in conclusion, that unless it is absolutely inconvenient (and, unreasonable as you may think me, I am not unreasonable enough even to wish you to come if it is), you will give your poor little fat friend the happiness of seeing you. I hope you admire my parenthesis! It

is an illustration of your system—such as you never, I am sure, expected to see, and such as (with pride I say it) few besides myself could execute.

You will gather from all this that, if I go to town at all this spring, it will not be till the middle of May. The Duchess of Oldenburgh, and Mr. Kean, and all the sights of the season will still be in flower then; and then, to my taste, the country will be less attractive than it is at present. I know not why it is that the tender green of April, the first butterflies, the first sunny days, have for me a charm which May with its beauty, and June with its fragrance, can never equal. To my mind they unite contrast of the past with hope for the future, and have a delicate, minute, and lurking beauty which the real lover of Nature loves the more ardently, because its coy graces escape the eyes of superficial observers. There is a selfishness in love, which would have the beloved object admired by none, loved by none, but the lover's eye and the lover's heart; and I know not whether, even in matters of taste, this principle does not influence us more than we are aware of. Authors, indeed, sacrifice this principle, as well as others more important, to the vanity of display or the luxury of description; but even in the mind of an author there lurks, I suspect, a hiding-place, a bower of taste, of which the clue may sometimes be found in letters but never in print. Luckily for you I have no frank, my dear friend, or this thread would be interminable. It breaks now perforce, and not even your knot can join it together again. O happy, happy hour, in which I let you off with a single letter! I don't think I have been so merciful for this twelvemonth.

Pray let me hear soon, and favourably. Mamma

joins in that wish most cordially, and in every good wish to you and yours.

Ever your sincere and affectionate friend,

M. R. MITFORD.

To DR. MITFORD, *Field Court, Gray's Inn.*

Bertram House, April 14, 1814.

You will easily imagine, my darling, that I was flattered and pleased with my American packet; but even you can scarcely imagine how much. I never was so vain of anything in my whole life. Only think of their having printed two editions (for the words "second edition" are underscored in their letter) before last October! Verily "a prophet has no honour in his own country." Don't you think I ought, in return for their kind present (the binding is most beautiful) and very handsome letter, to send them my other works, with a letter of thanks? I have got the 'Miscellaneous Poems,' second edition, and 'Watlington Hill,' which I could send you with the letter if you approve of it, and you could add 'Christina' to the parcel, which must, according to their directions, be transmitted to Longmans'. *Apropos*—the Longmans republish the 'American Review;' will you find out if the 'Narrative Poems' have been noticed in it? If all trades fail I shall set up for poetess in America. You know I have always longed to see it. Have you ever had any conversation with any one respecting 'Weston' and 'Watlington Hill;' and what is become of Mr. Chamberlayne's drawings?* I wish Murray would undertake it. I have a real affection for that kind and gentlemanly man. All the pets are well. How we shall ever be

* Illustrations of 'Weston.'

able to part with Buttercup I cannot imagine; she is the delight of the whole house. God bless you!

Ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

[Extract of letter from Mrs. Mitford of the same date:—]

With your letter and the newspaper this morning arrived a small parcel for our darling, directed to Miss Mary Russell Mitford, to the care of Mr. J. A. Valpy, Tooke's Court; by him it had, I suppose, been sent to Reading in a parcel to the Doctor, and from the Forbury transmitted to the Post Office. This pretty little packet contained,—what do you think? No less than 'Narrative Poems on the Female Character, in the Various Relations of Life,' by Mary Russell Mitford. Printed at New York, and published by Eastburn, Kirk, & Co., No. 86, Broadway. The volume is a small pocket size, well printed, and elegantly bound, and the following is a copy of the letter which accompanied it across the Atlantic:

"New York, Oct. 23, 1813.

"MADAM,

"We have the honour of transmitting to you a copy of our second edition of your admirable 'Narrative Poems on the Female Character.' All who have hearts to feel, and understandings to discriminate, must earnestly wish you health and leisure to complete your plan.

We shall be gratified by a line acknowledging the receipt of the copy through the medium of our friends, Messrs. Longmans and Co. We send it under the care

of the Rev. John B——, D.D., who has engaged to deliver it to Mr. Valpy.

"We have the honour to be, Madam,
"Your most obedient servants,
"EASTBURN, KIRK, & Co."

I have been obliged to leave a blank for the surname of the Rev. Doctor who brought the book to England from not being able to make out how it is spelt.

To DR. MITFORD, *Field Court, Gray's Inn.*

Bertram House, April 21, 1814.

Oh, my own dearest darling! What an inundation of misfortunes am I overwhelmed with! Answer Mr. Hayward, or tell me how to answer him; and let dear Mr. St. Q. know that he has *brought his pigs to the wrong market.* I am none of those who kick the dead lion.* Let him take his verses to Lord Byron, or the editor of the 'Times,' or the Poet Laureate, or the bellman, or any other official character, and they will translate them to his heart's content. Nay, he need not seek so far, for considering the poetical turn you yourself have lately evinced, I am quite convinced that, if he would put the French into English prose, you would do it justice in English verse, and, with a little touching up from your fair neighbour, produce between you a most astonishing epigram. After all, give my best love to dear Mr. St. Q., and tell him I forgive *him* for liking these wicked lines, because I know he always thought and felt as he does now; but his time-serving, fickle countrymen, who used to strain their wits to flatter the great man, whom they now send so

* Mr. St. Quintin wanted her to translate some epigrams against Napoleon.

composedly *aux enfers*, I cannot forgive. I looked full south all last night, so saw none of the Reading rejoicings. Indeed, I am quite innocent even of contemplating a laurel branch, for I don't believe we have one alive about the place, and I do hope the fury will have subsided before I have occasion to leave home. I hate all these insults to a fallen foe.

Mamma says I must conclude. God bless you! We are both and ever most fondly and faithfully your own,

MARY MITFORD.
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Fenton's Hotel, St. James's Street.*

Bertram House, May 8, 1814.

"MY DEAR ELFORD,

"My being in town is very uncertain. What are your intended movements? Do not forget your promise of letting us see you.

"Ever most truly yours,
"G. MITFORD."

This Spartan brevity of papa's, my dear friend, is very convenient to my desire of telling you how delighted I am with the prospect of our meeting here. These emperors are really very good sort of people, in spite of my republicanism; and Mr. Gray is a very great poet, in spite of Dr. Johnson; and that beautiful 'Elegy' is a most charming poem, in spite of the thousand and one times that everybody has wished it unwritten, when painfully see-sawed into their ears by some little master in petticoats, or some miss in the first page of her spelling-book. They are all good, great,

and charming, since they will procure me the pleasure of seeing you.

Are you not—even you, with all your anti-Napoleonism—shocked at the conduct of the Empress? All women have a right to complain of her for bringing a reproach on the sex. My only comfort is that she is a princess; and though I should hardly venture to assert to so great a naturalist as the one whom I have the honour to address, that a princess is not a woman; yet I think you will allow that the habits and training of the two-legged, unfeathered animal in question are (in spite of a few brilliant exceptions) wholly unfavourable to the feminine virtues. How can she be humble who is the constant object of deference and humility? How modest, in whom the absence of vice is praised as virtue? How gentle, to whom contradiction is unknown? How affectionate, who has never had need for tenderness? Placed on a gilded barge, "Youth at the helm, and Pleasure at the prow," she sails cheerily along "the smooth current of a summer sea," and shrinks back to her native shore at the first sound of the tempest. How contrary is this to all the feelings of us ordinary women! A woman would feel that on a throne there is not room for happiness—that in a palace she makes only a part of the state and trappings of royalty; belonging to her husband but not possessing him; and she would almost rejoice in a change which rendered her necessary to the father of her child. Her ambition might still, indeed, be mortified in those dear objects, for the glory of woman, like the light of the moon, is not emitted but reflected; but personally, with confidence I repeat it, she would rejoice in the change.

Have you seen my Lord Byron's ode? And are you

not shocked at the suicidal doctrine which it inculcates? He will finish that way himself from pure weariness of life. But true courage makes a different ending.

All the time that I have been writing, the nightingales have been desiring me to present their compliments and assure you they are rehearsing for a grand concert to perform before you. The other birds pay them wonderful respect this year. I returned on Friday out of Hampshire, and passed through several woods where we heard thousands of nightingales and not another bird. I suppose they were all listening. Mamma desires her kindest regards.

Ever, my dear friend, most affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, June 4, 1814.

I should have been in London at present, my dear Sir William, had mamma not made the discovery that the scarlet-fever was at my dear old governess's, Mrs. Rowden's, to whom I have promised a visit these four years. How the scarlet-fever got there, except it flew in at the window, I cannot imagine; for Mrs. Rowden, partly from fear of this pest and partly from love of that compound of dust, and smoke, and damp, and soot, which the Londoners are pleased to call air, lives in such a windmill that I, who value an ounce of heat more than a hundredweight of cold (don't be philosophic, and ask for my scales), always wrap up in extra shawls, bonnets, and veils to pay her a morning visit in April, just as I should prepare to drive in an open carriage through a December north wind across Mortimer Common—pray forgive my locality. One always feels in her rooms as if there was a ventilator at

each ear and each elbow, and a hundred pair of bellows blowing from the floor to the ceiling and the four sides of the room. One would think that the old Grecian mythology was really true, and that she was priestess of all the wind gods at once; for I am sure not a breath of air stirs in London without making the tour of her house. I would as soon live upon the top of a weathercock; and have bespoken a room with a door that will shut, and windows that won't open, against I make my visit.

A word about 'Patronage' and Miss Edgeworth. She has deviated, for the first time I believe in her life, from her old and excellent rule of saying nothing of trees, rivers, mountains, and such branches of learning, and has treated us with a description of external nature, filched, I verily believe, from Mrs. Radcliffe, in her account of "the hills"—"rocks, fringed with mountain shrubs"—"streams gushing on pebbly channels"—"long narrow winding valleys and steeps crowned with wood." And all this is in Hampshire! where certainly Miss Edgeworth can never have set her foot, and where gushing streams and rocky mountains are equally unknown.

It was not the south of Hampshire that she meant; she intended to place the "hills" north of Winchester: and though the general character of this part of the country is very inferior to the delightful environs of my beloved Southampton, yet even there she might have met with spots of singular and peculiar beauty. Among the extensive tracts of woodland round Alresford, I know many such—woods opening into sweet irregular glades, with a white cottage peeping through the shades, and a long vista of hills seen through some irregular arch formed by a turn of the winding road—such a home scene, with its catching lights and its

lovely tranquillity, as Gainsborough might have painted. In other spots, the woods seem closing irregularly round a green common, a village church at the summit, surrounded with pretty cottages and quiet farms, with its tiny stream and wooden bridge dividing the straggling houses. This is perhaps too tame for painting; but its effect in sunset is exquisitely soothing and sweet.

There are other spots near my native place, less general if not more lovely, particularly a long common called Tichburn Down, terminated on one side by a gentle ascent crowned with wood to the very summit, and on the other by distant hills folding in on each other with exquisite grace. The down is entirely spotted with small islets (the country people called them hassocks) of low trees, and luxuriant underwood of different shapes and sizes. The beauty and richness of these hassocks it is impossible to describe. Stunted oaks, giant maybushes, hawthorn, broom, and fern, all so matted and so fringed to the ground, that, except where the lambs have forced themselves a bower amongst the dog-roses and woodbine with which they are covered, it seems impossible even for the hand to penetrate the labyrinth. The shepherd's house adds much to this charming spot.

There is another scene, too, near Bramdean, of down meeting the woods, and wood stealing into the down, softened and connected with groups of trees, of hawthorn, of juniper—with bays of turf receding, and headlands or forest advancing—spangled with cottages, and bounded with folding hills, that is graceful, airy, and lightsome beyond all description. At a delightful place near this spot,* Charlotte Smith passed the brilliant years of her early life. God bless you, my dear friend! Adieu.

* Brookwood Park, the seat of Colonel Greenwood.

To DR. MITFORD, *Star Office, Temple Bar.*

Bertram House, June 11, 1814.

Last night, my dearest darling, Francis brought word that a regiment of Light Dragoons was come to Reading to be ready to attend on the Emperor, &c., on their intended visit. It is almost impossible to believe that this report can be true; not so much on account of Lord ——'s character, as his notorious poverty. He could scarcely find credit for a collation to stay the royal stomachs. It is scarcely possible; but, assuming the fact, I could not resist the temptation of writing the first libel I ever had the honour to compose. I rely on your discretion not to lodge me, or get lodged yourself, either in Newgate, Horsemonger Lane, or the Coldbath Fields.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

33, Hans Place,* Tuesday morning,
June 12, 1814.

I am upon a morning visit to Mrs. Rowden, my own dearest darling, and as she is busy making out bills I seize the opportunity to scribble to you, though my epistle may probably not go till to-morrow. You know that we got safe and in good time to Hatch Gate; and though I set out with only one fellow-passenger, yet they gathered like a snowball, and we came in with a coach loaded beyond all precedent. Mrs. St. Quintin was all kindness.

I heard that the Emperor and Co. were expected at —— on Friday, but they say here that it will not be. Perry is delighted with my libel (for a libel it is);

* Mr. St. Quintin's.

he means to read it to all the world. We are to see the whole set, Emperor and all, go in state to the City on Saturday morning, at dear Mr. Perry's,* and then go to the Opera. Did papa tell you that he had seen poor, poor Lord Cochrane, that victim to his uncle's villainy, almost every day? He wept like a child to papa. And they say that the last dreadful degradation, the hacking off the spurs of knighthood, is actually meant to be put in force upon him. Miss Rowden has behaved uncommonly well about the 'March of Mind.' Her head girl, Miss Willes, who runs away with all the prizes, is to recite it. Papa is just come here at four o'clock, and I must leave him the rest of the paper. God bless you, my dearest darling!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

33, Hans Place, June 16, 1814.

Yesterday, my own dearest granny, was I think the most fatiguing morning I ever underwent. Stuffed into a conspicuous place, stared at, talked to, or talked at, by everybody, dying with heat, worn out with flattery, I really should have wished myself in heaven or somewhere worse, if I had not been comforted by William Harness, who sat behind me laughing at everybody, and more playful and agreeable than any one I ever remember—better than Henry Joy. To begin with the beginning, I was desired to go early, and accordingly the first coach I saw arrive was my signal for leaving 33.

* The 'Morning Chronicle' Office.

We had no exercises; nothing but music and recitations, which lasted nearly four hours, and did them great credit. The 'March of Mind' was well repeated, and received of course as verses commonly are in the presence of the authoress. I was to have presented the prizes; but to my great comfort Lady Caroline Lamb arrived, and I insisted on giving her my post. In the evening Mrs. Rowden and Mrs. Welles, Mr. Appleyard, papa, and I went to see Lady Charlotte Dennis's grounds.* They are really incredible. What do you think of a dozen different ruins, half a dozen pillars, ditto urns, ditto hermitages, ditto grottoes, ditto rocks, ditto fortresses, ditto bridges, ditto islands, ditto live bears, foxes, and deer, with statues, wooden, leaden, bronze, and marble past all count? What do you think of all this crammed into a space of about ten acres, and at the back of Hans Place? It is really incredible. Mr. Dubster's villa was nothing to it. And all this has been done in the nineteenth century, for in Mr. Holland's time it was a pretty lawn, with walks and trees and flowering shrubs—no stone but in the gravel walks, and no urns, new or old. It is incredible. I fell desperately in love with the bear, who is the most beautiful, amiable animal (except Marmy) I ever saw. Don't tell poor Marmy, for it might make him jealous.

A thousand thanks for your goodness in sending my glass; it was more my fault than Lucy's. I cannot tell you what we do to-day, for Mr. Hayward, forsooth, wants papa to go to the Tower with him about some blunderbuss; and it is a great shame that he should want papa when the morning would be so delightful for the Exhibitions. If the Emperor does not

* The Pavilion, of which the entrance was in Hans Place.

go to Drury Lane, we are to have places this evening to see Kean play 'Othello;' but if he does, we cannot have any to-night, but are promised seats for Monday to see 'Richard the Third,' which I should prefer. Everett, Fanny, and Willy go on Saturday to Worthing for the holidays. How little people in the country know of fashions! I see nothing but cottage bonnets trimmed with a double plaiting, and sometimes two double plaitings, and broad satin ribbon round the edge. Gowns with half a dozen breadths in them, up to the knees before and scarcely decent behind, with triple flounces, and sleeves like a carter's frock, sometimes drawn at about two inches distant, and sometimes not, which makes the arms look as big as Miss Taylor's body. I like none of this but the flouncing, which is very pretty, and I shall bring three or four yards of striped muslin to flounce my gowns and yours. Tell Mrs. Haw, with my love, to prepare for plenty of hemming and whipping, and not to steal my needles.

We drank many happy years to you, yesterday, my darling; and I did so long to see you, and sent you more kisses and God blesses than I have time to tell you. Papa will probably write in town to-day, and this will be to-morrow's letter; so we must leave room for a little news.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

Thursday night.—I have been to see Haydon's picture, and I am enchanted—quite enchanted! It is worth walking to Reading to see. I saw, too, in a printshop the beautiful print of 'Napoleon le Grand,' of which you know there were but three in England, and those not to be sold. Oh that any good Christian would give

me that picture! God bless you, my own darling! Ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

P.S. by Dr. Mitford.

One o'clock. We have breakfasted, my beloved Mary, with our friend Perry, and I have left our treasure at the Freemasons' Tavern, to attend the meeting of the Friends against the slave trade. She expects to hear Grey, Lansdowne, Wilberforce, Sussex, Smith, &c.

THE MARCH OF MIND.

WRITTEN BY MISS MITFORD FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN SCHOOL SOCIETY, AND SPOKEN AT MRS. ROWDEN'S ON JUNE 24, 1814, BY MISS WILLES.

Fair Nature smiled in all her bowers,
  But man, the master-work of God,
Unconscious of his latent powers,
  The tangled forest trod;
Without a hope, without an aim,
  Beyond the sloth's, the tiger's life,
  His only pleasure sleep or strife,
And war his only fame.

Furious alike and causeless beam'd
  His lasting hate, his transient love;
And e'en the mother's fondness seemed
  The instinct of the dove.
The mental world was wrapt in night;
  Though some, the diamonds of the mine,
  Burst through the shrouding gloom, to shine
With self-emitted light.

Oh, how the glorious dawn unfold?
  The brighter day that lurk'd behind?
The march of armies may be told,
  But not the march of mind.
Instruction! child of heaven and earth,
  As heat expands the vernal flower,
  So wisdom, goodness, freedom, power,
From thee derive their birth.

From thee all mortal bliss we draw;
  From thee Religion's blessed fruit;
From thee the good of social law,
  And man redeem'd from brute;
From thee all ties to virtue dear,
  The father's, brother's, husband's name;
  From thee the sweet and holy fame
That never cost a tear.

Oh, breathe thy soul along the gale!
  That Britons still, in generous strife,
Knowledge and freedom may inhale
  The mingled breath of life!
So shall they share what they possess,
  And show to distant worlds thy charms;
  Wisdom and peace their only arms,
Their only aim to bless.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

33, Hans Place, Saturday morning,
June 18, 1814.

Papa told you yesterday, my dear granny, where he left me; and the 'Morning Chronicle' will, of course, give you an account of the meeting; but nothing can convey to you the exquisite pleasure I felt in hearing all these great men on a subject so rousing and animating. We stayed there till five o'clock, in the best place in the whole room, a gallery elevated above all crowd and all bustle. Much as I was delighted with the speakers, I was beyond anything astonished at the want of fluency under which most of them—particularly Lords Grey and Holland—labour. Lord Grey has all the Ogle hesitation, and my noble patron has my habit of hackering so completely that he scarcely speaks three words without two stops; but when we can get at his meaning it is better than any one's. My expectations were most disappointed in Brougham, and most surpassed in

Wilberforce. I no longer wonder at the influence he holds over so large a portion of the "religionists," as he calls them; he is a most interesting and persuasive speaker. Altogether I never spent such a morning, and I owe it, as I do all my London pleasures, to papa, dear papa, and dear Mr. Perry, with whom we breakfasted.

To-day we (that is Mrs. St. Quintin, Miss Graham, papa, and I) go to the 'Chronicle' office to see the procession;* after which Mrs. St. Quintin and Miss Graham return, and we go to the Opera. Mr. Perry had lent his box to Mrs. Donaldson, but he means to insist on her taking me, and I don't doubt but he will manage it. Horatia Perry and one of her young friends from school will be the only persons we shall meet, except, I believe, Henry Joy. Mrs. Rowden and Mrs. Everett went to-day with Fanny, Willy, and another child to Worthing —all rammed into one post-chaise; a pretty journey they will have of it. You have no notion what a belle Miss Rowden is become. She is by far the finest lady extant; more flounced and furbelowed than all London put together; and looking really quite well and young in the face—considering.

Mr. Perry read us a most delightful libel of Moore's yesterday, 'The Two Veterans,' a dialogue between Blucher and the Regent, but he does not print either that or mine. Wordsworth is bringing out an epic in quarto; and so is Eustace, the man who wrote the long, dull book on Italy. This is all the literary news I know. Report speaks highly of Wordsworth's poem. Mrs. Perry returns next month from Lisbon, not, I fear, much better, and Miss Lunan comes up in about a week to prepare for her and to attend some splendid parties. Mr. Perry wants me to stay; but I can't, you know,

* To the Merchant Taylors' Hall.

stay so long from my own dear granny. No—I shall certainly come home after I have seen Kean, though I don't quite know what day, because I must also see the Exhibitions. We see Kean on Monday, and it would be too much to see the Exhibitions the same morning.

Did I tell you that the Water Colour Exhibition was closed when we went to see Haydon's picture, and that they had the uncommon civility to admit us alone? The evening sun, with its fine mellow light, was just on the figures. The men said they had never seen it to such advantage; and such a picture I never beheld. All that has been said of it falls short of its beauty. Mr. Hills has some fine cattle pieces, and Glover some lovely landscapes.

The Reids are at Brighton, and two of the young Perrys with them. Horatio, William, and Erskine are at different schools, and Helen is, you know, with her mother. . . . God bless you, my dear!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

P.S.—The Emperor Alexander is quite a *bon vivant*, and cracks his glass and his stories with the Regent to his heart's content. The King of Prussia is really a fine character, and nobody runs after *him*. *Ainsi va le monde.* Adieu, my darling.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

33, Hans Place, Sunday morning,
June 19, 1814.

The 'Chronicle,' my dearest granny, will tell you so much more of the procession than I can, that I will not attempt to mix a description of fine carriages and fine people with the account which I seize a bad quiet morning to give you of our proceedings. Suffice it to

say that we got there well and pleasantly and saw them all most clearly; that the Emperor and Duchess are much alike—she a pretty woman—he a fine-looking man—both with fair complexions and round *Tartar* features—no expression of any sort except affability and good-humour; that the King of Prussia is a much more interesting and intelligent-looking man, though not so handsome; and that the Regent got notably hissed, in spite of his protecting presence.

It is scarcely necessary to say that we were received with the most unbounded kindness. Mr. Perry was so lucky as to go into the City to dine with the great folks, and papa was left to act as master of the ceremonies to upwards of twenty ladies, among whom, to my infinite pleasure, was my dear and charming Mrs. Reid—more kind and friendly than ever. She is only in town for a day or two on business, but gave me a pressing invitation to go and see her. We had everything that can be imagined excellent as refreshments—ices, cakes, sandwiches, champagne, &c. The procession, of which the chief beauties were the Regent's horses and the splendid military spectacle, was over early enough to allow me to get dressed (I mean only my hair dressed, for I wore my crape frock and a spencer) in excellent time to get to the Opera. (I don't know a word that I write, for we have a room full of company.) Papa took me to the Opera and stayed the whole time. Nothing was ever so pleasant as the Donaldsons; they were everything that is kind and attentive. I never saw so full an opera. After the ballet began, we went down into the concert-room, which was brilliantly lighted and carpeted, and full of company from the boxes in expectation of the Emperor. I never spent so pleasant an hour as the fruitless hour (for the Emperor

did not come) which we spent there, talking to, and laughing with, so many clever men. It was worth twenty operas and a hundred processions. We went back time enough to see the last part of the ballet, and came home more delighted than ever. God bless you, my own dearest!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

June 21, 1814.

We are just come, my dearest mother, from the Court of King's Bench, Westminster Abbey, and the House of Commons, where we were gallanted by half a dozen members, Colonel Beaumont, Sir James Graham, Davies Giddy, *etcetera.* You cannot conceive how much they were entertained with showing Miss Graham and me all these things, and I really think I was the favourite.

Poor Lord Cochrane! he is to be imprisoned a year—a thousand pounds penalty—and to stand in the pillory! All this was over before we got to Westminster Hall; but we heard Brougham argue a cause before the Lord Ellenborough. I am now writing at the Transport Office. The dear good Doctor desires his best love to you. Before we went to all these places we went to see Hogarth's and Wilson's pictures, which are beautiful beyond all description—more particularly the smaller pictures of Wilson. Remember me to Harriet and Mrs. Haw. She was a good girl to find strawberries for my own dear granny. God bless you, my own darling!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. MITFORD.

W. H—— preached and read prayers at Paddington last Sunday, and Mrs. Siddons was so affected that she shed tears. I dare say he does read very finely. Again, God bless you, my own pet!

POOR OLD MUD AGAIN.

I never saw so strong a likeness as Brougham bears to my grandfather's picture. Papa does not see it, but it is so, and I would give the world you could see him. Once again, God bless you, my own dear darling!

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Morning Chronicle Office, Wednesday morning, June 22, 1814.

We are just come in from the Somerset House Exhibition, my own dearest; and, as Mr. Perry is not here, we take the opportunity of writing to you. There is nothing but note-paper to be had, which luckily suits us just as well. We have been besides to the 'Star' office, where we were of course received with great attention and saw Mr. Galt, who is just returned from Paris, and gives, as every one else does, a deplorable account of French society, manners, morals, and amusements: there is nothing worth seeing except the stolen goods.

Previous to our going to the 'Star' office we had a long conversation with Mr. Fox.* Papa brought him to our little friend's, whither Mr. Appleyard conducted me. To say that he was all civility would be saying too little—he was all friendliness. Everybody seems to wish me to hear the performance of my own verses on Friday, and as Miss Graham is very desirous to go with me, and Mr. Fox will secure

* A dissenting preacher of pulpit, platform, and parliamentary repute.

the gallery, and papa will place us there, I think I shall be tempted to stay; but we must return on Saturday. Poor Mud is so granny-sick, so very granny-sick, that she can stay away no longer. Quintin heard last night from Paris. Mr. St. Q. complains much of the difficulty of obtaining an audience of the minister, who holds his levée at seven in the morning, to the Frenchman's great discomposure. Dear Mr. Perry just come in—going to take me to Campbell's lecture on poetry. God bless you, my own darling!

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

33, Hans Place, Friday morning,
June 24, 1814.

I begin, my own dear darling, by telling you what I believe you will call bad news. In consequence of a pressing note from the Harnesses, inviting me to dine with them on Sunday, we shall not return before Monday or Tuesday; you shall know to-morrow.

I broke off on Wednesday just as we were going to Campbell's lecture with dear Mr. Perry. Never in my life was I so highly gratified. Campbell's person is extremely insignificant—his voice weak—his reading detestable—and his pronunciation neither English nor Scotch; and yet, in spite of all these disadvantages, the exquisite beauty of the images, the soft and sweet propriety of the diction, and the admirable tact of his criticisms enchanted and almost electrified the audience. Campbell's prose is all light—one longs for a little common writing as shades to the picture. And yet there were some terrible heresies; he likes Thomson's 'Seasons,' which nobody, you know, likes

now; and he prefers Pope to Dryden, which is quite astounding. Everybody stared; and to make them stare, he said it. By-the-way, he was very unfair; for in comparing them he never mentioned the Music Ode. He made a very strong allusion to poor Lord Cochrane, which was unanimously seized by the audience; in short, I never knew such interest, such respect, such pity as he excites.* After the lecture, Perry hurried us off to speak to Campbell, who was polite beyond all politeness. By this sudden carrying away I lost the speaking to a great many friends—Mrs. Opie, the Liebenroods and some more—and led Henry Joy a pretty dance to find me, in which he did not succeed.

Yesterday I went, as you know, to the play with papa, and on our road thither had a very great pleasure in meeting Lord Wellington, just arrived in London, and driving to his own house in an open carriage and six. We had an excellent sight of him, so excellent that I should know him again anywhere; and it was quite refreshing, after all those parading foreigners, emperors, and so forth, to see an honest English hero with a famous Mitford nose, looking quite happy, without any affectation of bowing and seeming affable. He is a very fine-countenanced man, tanned and weatherbeaten, with good dark eyes, and something of a look of the very clever actor of the name of Smith, whom they had at Reading two or three years ago. Very few of the populace knew him; but

* The lines which Mr. Campbell quoted, and his audience applied to Lord Cochrane, are those beginning—

> "Justice gives sentence many times
> On one man for another's crimes,"

in the second canto of the second part of 'Hudibras.'

the intelligence spread like wildfire, and Piccadilly looked like a hive of bees in swarming-time.

To-day Miss Graham, Mr. Appleyard, and I, go to the gallery at Freemasons' Hall* to hear splendid speeches and superlative poetry, and to see—but, alas! not to share—super-excellent eating. Terribly and fearfully gallant is the etiquette of a public dinner, which considers and treats men as mortals—well-filled mortals—and women as angels—starving angels. To be sure we mean to dine before we set out, and I shall have my fill of blushing. The comfort is that Mr. Campbell—the great Mr. Campbell—blushed like a boiled lobster, and I don't mean to blush deeper than a crawfish.

God bless you, my own dear darling! I shall not, perhaps, write to-morrow, but papa will certainly, and he, I expect, will finish this. Remember us to all friends, if any you see—at all events, Marmy, Mercutio, and poor Mrs. Haw. Everybody asks for you and desires kind regards. Once more, God bless you, my own dear pet!

Ever most fondly your own,
M. R. M.

* Extract from the 'Morning Chronicle' of June 25, 1814:—

"The friends of the British and Foreign School Society dined together yesterday at the Freemasons' Tavern. The Marquis of Lansdowne took the chair, supported by the Dukes of Kent and Sussex, the Earls of Darnley and Eardley, and several other eminent persons. The health of the Chairman and Vice-Presidents was drunk, and then that of the female members of the Society. After this a poetical tribute of Miss Mitford's was sung, and 'Thanks to Miss Mitford' was drunk with applause.

To MRS. MITFORD, *Bertram House.*

Hans Place, Monday morning,
June 27, 1814.

We had a very pleasant day yesterday, first, in the Park, which was very crowded, and, secondly, at the good Dr. Harness's. Mrs. H. appears to great advantage in her own house. We had a most splendid dinner and a very agreeable party. Sir Robert Calder, a most delightful man of seventy, who looked less than fifty, was the life of the party; and there was besides a General Wemyss (his wife was prevented being there, being worn out with imperial gaiety), who was extremely pleasant; William, all gaiety and attention, and some other people who filled chairs.

I was quite a little goddess; Sir Robert kissing one gloved hand, and the General the other; and William stretched across an ottoman before me, like Hamlet at the feet of Ophelia. It was Freemasons' Hall in miniature, but much more pleasant; for my feelings on Friday were pleasure stretched to pain. I did not believe my own ears when Lord Lansdowne, with his usual graceful eloquence, gave my health. I did not even believe it, when my old friend, the Duke of Kent, observing that Lord Lansdowne's voice was not always strong enough to penetrate the depths of that immense assembly, reiterated it with stentorian lungs. Still less did I believe my ears when it was drunk with "three times three," a flourish of drums and trumpets from the Duke of Kent's band, and the unanimous thundering and continued plaudits of five hundred people. I did not believe my own ears. I really thought it must be Mr. Whitbread. And, though I wondered how he could be "fair and amiable," I still thought it him; till his

health was really drunk and he rose to make the beautiful speech of which you have only a very faint outline in the 'Chronicle.'* The glowing praises which he bestowed upon me still ring in my ears, and if you find me vainer than any peacock, I beg you to attribute it to the overset which my brains experienced on Friday. Everybody tells me such a compliment to a young untitled woman is absolutely unprecedented; and I am congratulated and be-praised by every soul who sees me. The Joys came to me after the speech of Whitbread and remained with me a long time—George very friendly, and Henry very gallant. They both made a thousand inquiries after you, but I made none after Mr. Joy and his sister.

I am quite delighted to hear of Maria's safety and the dear Lord's† good health. I am dying to pet and kiss and love my own dear, dear granny. Papa dines here, but will not, I think, arrive in time to write. He only came for ten minutes, to say he was going to Lord Shrewsbury's and the Browns'. He sends his best love, and is quite well, and not worn off his feet. Good-bye till to-morrow, dear, to-morrow.

Ever and ever most fondly your own,

M. R. M.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, July 5, 1814.

MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

Just after my last letter I most unexpectedly went to town, where I remained very contentedly till a few

* Mr. Whitbread proposed a toast, "The Cause of Education throughout the World," observing that Miss Mitford had designated it "The March of Mind."

† *i. e.*, Lord Marmion, her greyhound.

days ago, seeing sights and hearing scandal, and peering with shortsighted eyes to discover of what wood crown-blocks are made. During all this I was, however, a little ashamed of my country, and still more of my sex. The frenzy was universal; but the ladies were as mad as maniacs at the full of the moon—the gentlemen only in the first quarter. They were ladies, alas! ladies, who barred up Piccadilly in carriages and on foot—ladies who hired seats at Escudier's for a guinea an hour—ladies who rammed bank notes into the Emperor's hand to get them consecrated by his touch—and ladies who, to obtain a kiss of the same magnanimous hand, threw themselves *toute eplorée* with nosegays at his feet. What could they have done more if it had been the Emperor Napoleon!

It is quite refreshing to turn from these barbarous Scythians with their Tartar features (I don't mean to include the King of Prussia—I admire him extremely, both in mind and person), to the *beau-idéal* of royalty in Mr. Haydon's exquisite picture. I saw it to the greatest possible advantage with the mellow evening light full upon it, and not a soul in the room but our own party. Are people deserting my beautiful picture? Perhaps I did not like it the less because you have purchased it. One thing, and one thing only, gave me pain in this charming picture; and that is the inveterate and most distressing likeness which King Solomon bears to Queen Anne. It is Queen Anne, with beauty, with intellect, with majesty, with penetration; but still it is Queen Anne. Did you perceive the resemblance? It is impossible so much to admire the production without feeling a strong interest for the author—I mean the artist. Is he a man of education; or has genius, as in

Opie's case, forced itself upwards? Is he likely to obtain employment in his own high sphere, or will he —like Sir Joshua—sink into portrait-painting? He is your countryman, I know, as well as Sir Joshua's. I wonder, for my part, what business Devonshire has to monopolize all the men of genius!

Well, I went to see Mr. Kean, and was thoroughly disgusted. This monarch of the stage is a little insignificant man, slightly deformed, strongly ungraceful, seldom pleasing the eye, still seldomer satisfying the ear—with a voice between grunting and croaking, a perpetual hoarseness which suffocates his words, and a vulgarity of manner which his admirers are pleased to call nature—the nature of Teniers it may be, but not that of Rafaelle. I am quite sure that in any character where he can possibly raise his voice above conversation pitch—where there is anything like strong writing that he can contrive to rant, or anything resembling passion for him to tear to rags—his acting will always be, if not actually insupportable, yet unequal, disappointing, and destructive of all illusion. It is extremely dangerous to avow this heresy. Belles and beaux, who know as much of the drama as my Marmion, praise him in one word—"He electrifies me!" Clever men like him much, and praise him much more, because he is not Kemble, whom I dislike as much as they do; and then, for the *coup de grâce*, up starts some elderly gentleman and knocks you down at once with—"Madam, I have seen Garrick, and since the days of Garrick I neve saw"—and so forth.

Do you know that Mr. Perry and I ran a very imminent risk of standing in the pillory ourselves! Some malicious fiend prompted me to write a libel, and he

was just going to insert it in the 'Chronicle,' when the guardian genius called Prudence, who so seldom interferes in libel matters, interposed—took counsel's opinion — and, to Mr. Perry's great discontent, suppressed the epigram. I do really believe he would have ventured.

There is nothing heard of in London but Epics—ponderous *Epics*. Mr. Wordsworth has one, and Mr. Eustace is about to fatigue the world with another. To make glorious amends for all this, Mr. Moore's Persian tale is finished; I have even seen a part of it in manuscript, and I hope in a few days to see the whole in print. He has sold it for three thousand pounds. The little I have seen is beyond all praise and all price: in these bargaining days this is not an anticlimax. God bless you, my dear friend!

Ever most affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, August 12, 1814.

Oh, my dear Sir William, what wicked will-o'-th'-wisp, what malignant elf or spirit of night, bewildered me into the thorny brake of politics!

I have two points to explain with regard to Lord Cochrane. How I could ever be so foolish as to say that the Westminster election would prove his innocence I cannot imagine. Something, I suppose, was rolling in my head that if a man be convicted by twelve jurors, and acquitted by twelve thousand (for certainly the last Westminster election was a trial, in every sense of the word), the probability is, that he is

not guilty. This was my mistake; yours is, that I was influenced in my opinion by Lord Cochrane's politics. So far is this from the truth, that I do not know a single man in the House who has occasioned me, in common with all true Reformers, so much vexation of spirit as my Lord Cochrane, who was always bringing the good cause into disrepute by bungling and blundering—who never made a motion but one wished it unmade, and never uttered a speech but one wished he had held his tongue. Lord Cochrane's professional talents are doubtless beyond all praise; but for his civil, I have less admiration than most people. I have not seen much of him lately, but some six years ago we spent nearly three weeks in the same house. It must be confessed that in those days I was most comfortably shy; I very seldom got beyond "No" and "Yes," and "If you please," and "Very well, I thank you;" and his lordship, on his part, being a man who very well remembers the nursery precept of never speaking till he is spoken to, I do not imagine that our mutual conversation (that I mean which we addressed to each other) averaged more than three words and a half per day. But in spite of this particular want of attention, and the general languor, and absence of all colloquial brilliancy which distinguished him, it was impossible not to be impressed with the excellence—the singular excellence—of Lord Cochrane's character. Such sweetness of temper, such unassuming modesty, such kindness to the weak, such candour to the absent, and such a tenacious adherence to truth in any the most trifling occurrence, I have scarcely ever witnessed; and the feeling of my mind the moment I heard the story was the exact converse of Hume's famous—too famous—argument on miracles. It is more probable

that impossibilities should happen than that this man should tell a falsehood. Papa, who has been always very intimate with him, and has seen him most frequently since he has been confined, has the same conviction; and I would give my three best roses (and roses are growing scarce now) if I could convert you.

I have just been reading the volume which Lord Byron and Mr. Rogers have published in conjunction, 'Lara and Jacqueline.' Nothing can be so entertaining as the manner in which Lord Byron *veut garder l'anonyme*, by fairly letting out the secret in the preface. He puts me in mind of a child playing at hide and seek, who gets behind a window curtain, pops out its head, and then cries "You shan't find me." 'Lara' is a continuation of 'The Corsair;' not so exquisitely fine as 'The Corsair' certainly; but still such a continuation as none but the author of that splendid poem could have produced. 'Jacqueline' is, like everything belonging to Mr. Rogers (except himself), exceedingly pretty, though in a different style of prettiness from his other productions—less finished and more interesting. I have also been reading 'The Wanderer.' The first observation which strikes every one on the perusal of this disappointing work is, what bad company Madame D'Arblay must have kept since she wrote 'Camilla!' Where could she find such gentlemen and ladies as she has chosen to represent?

Ever most affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, Oct. 31, 1814.

You ask me, my good friend, to recommend you some entertaining new books. Alas! in this Gothic neighbourhood, this vile residence of Huns and Vandals, new books are as rare and almost as welcome as springs in the African deserts. Have you read Walter Scott's 'Waverley?' I have ventured to say 'Walter Scott's,' though I hear he denies it, just as a young girl denies the imputation of a lover; but if there be any belief in internal evidence it must be his. It is his by a thousand indications—by all the faults and all the beauties—by the unspeakable and unrecollectable names—by the vile pedantry of French, Latin, Gaelic, and Italian—by the hanging the clever hero, and marrying the stupid one—by the praise (well deserved, certainly, for when had Scotland ever such a friend! but thrust in by the head and shoulders) of the late Lord Melville—by the sweet lyric poetry—by the perfect costume—by the excellent keeping of the picture—by the liveliness and gaiety of the dialogues—and last not least, by the entire and admirable individuality of every character in the book, high as well as low—the life and soul which animates them all with a distinct existence, and brings them before our eyes like the portraits of Fielding and Cervantes. Upon reading this sentence over (backward, by-the-way, with the view of finding where it began), I am struck with the manner in which I have contrived without story-telling to convey to you a higher idea of the work than I entertain myself. There is nothing that I would unsay, and yet you would infallibly think that I like it better than I really do; though I do like it very much indeed. The character which I prefer is

the Baron of Bradwardine; and yet his is perhaps the least original of any; a mere compound—but a most entertaining compound—of Shakespeare's Fluellen and Smollett's Lismahago. The character that I like least is Flora McIvor, whom the author (who ought to be the best judge) seems to like best. Pray tell me which are your favourites.

If you have never read Miss Burney's 'Traits of Nature,' I would recommend that also to your perusal. It is sweetly elegant. I have not read 'Mansfield Park.' 'Pride and Prejudice' I thought extremely good.

I have to thank you for recommending me to a book which delights me more than almost any I ever read in my life. You of course anticipate that I must mean Walton's 'Angler.' I am afraid to begin to praise it, for fear my frank should not have space enough to contain my encomiums; but I must mention the sweet pastoral poetry, and those descriptive touches in the still sweeter and more harmonious prose, which I can compare to nothing but the tender green of the young leaves and the balmy freshness of a summer shower. The style is indescribably beautiful, and shows still the brighter for coming into immediate contact with the notes and preface of the Right Worshipful Sir John Hawkins, with his tribe of where-ofs, and where-ins, and where-bys, and with their cousins, the there-ofs, and there-ins, and there-bys, and all the vile compounds that warrants and musical dictionaries, justice-learning and fiddling-learning, could invent or produce. In point of style, all men now write pretty much alike. The good days are passed when the very arrangement of the words showed, as in Walton, in Addison, and in Johnson, almost as much as the thoughts they embodied of the writer's disposition. The diffusion of

education, and partly, perhaps, the general habit of composition, has done this with your sex; but style, I think, though not bearing the impress of the individual in men, is still as much the criterion of mind and temper in women, as when the 'Spectators' reflected, as in a mirror, the blameless purity of Addison, and the 'Ramblers' showed, as in a majestic cast, the strength and sublimity of Dr. Johnson.

This is a terrible admission, for it shows that we are less cultivated; but I do not know that it is so terrible. Who would not rather be a Bristol farthing or a Birmingham halfpenny than one of Swift's smooth shillings? Now for my instances. Who can read a page of Miss Seward's writings, on any subject, without finding her out at once, from the mere putting together of the words, for the Venus and Muse of a provincial city; the one-eyed monarch of the blind at Lichfield, who thought nobody could see elsewhere; the pedantic coquette, and cold-hearted sensibility-monger: in a word, the female Dr. Darwin of England and literature? Can any one open 'The Countess and Gertrude' without seeing Miss Hawkins's long nose, her prejudices, her orthodoxy, in short, her worshipful papa himself in petticoats spring up before them? Joanna Baillie's singular modesty, her noble simplicity, and unaffected goodness are as strongly stamped on her every sentence as her brilliant and lightsome fancy, or her commanding genius; and the sweetness and loveliness of Mrs. Henry Tighe live in every line of her enchanting poem.

To-morrow.

Oh, my dear, dear Sir William, when you so kindly talked of my poor Marmion you never dreamed that I had been crying three days together for his loss! After

distinguishing himself more than ever last year, both here and in Hampshire—after being my companion and playmate, and winding himself into my heart all the summer—in the very prime of his life, and height of his beauty, he caught the distemper, and died within a fortnight. You may well believe he did not die for want of nursing ; and so much did the care and attention I showed him, and his sweet gratitude and patience, endear him to me, that I am sure I should not have grieved half so much had he died the first day of his illness, as I did on the last. But everybody loved him. Every creature in the house cried when he died, papa inclusive—though I believe papa's grief was rather of a compound nature, a great deal for our dear Marmion, a great deal for me, and a little for the loss of the Ilsley cup.

God bless you, my dear friend! I beg, and implore, and desire you to put yourself in a passion directly, and to write soon to your very grateful, very affectionate, and very enraged little friend,

M. R. MITFORD.

[*Lines enclosed in the foregoing letter.*]

ON THE DEATH OF MARMION,

A FAVOURITE GREYHOUND.

Farewell! a long farewell to thee,
The fleetest, bravest hound
That ever coursed on hill or lea,
Or swept the heathy ground;
Foremost, whatever dog was there,
My Marmion! Slayer of the hare!

Farewell! a long farewell to thee,
The fondest, dearest, best,
That ever played around my knee,
Or leaped upon my breast;
By all beloved, and loving all,
My Marmion! Favourite of the hall!

Thou died'st when Fame's bright wreath was nearest
On Ilsley's dreary heath;
I should have sung thy triumph, dearest,
And not have mourned thy death;
Most cherished in that parting hour
Which showed thy love's undying power!

Who dreamed of death that gazed on thee!
Thy light and golden form,
Skimming along the meadowy sea,
A sunbeam in the storm!
From air and fire derived, thy birth
Had nought to do with drossy earth.

With spirit dancing in thine eye,
Love brooding in thy breast,
Gay as the flower-fed butterfly,
Calm as the turtle's nest;
Free from the care, the thought of man,
Bliss crowned thy being's little span.

And loved in life, and mourned in death,
Upon thy simple bier
The rose and myrtle's fragrant breath
Blend with affection's tear;
And proudly verdant laurels wave
Their branches o'er my Marmion's grave.

And long thy memory shall live,
And long thy well-earned fame,
And oft a sigh shall coursers give
At thy remembered name;
And long thy mistress' heart shall tell
The sadness of her last farewell!

Bertram House, Oct. 1814.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, Dec. 20, 1814.

A thousand thanks to you, my dear friend, for your most kind and delightful letter. You cannot imagine how opportunely and refreshingly it came upon me. We are shut up here by the waters of this second deluge, in a sort of stationary ark—a kind of *inhabited desert island;* and to make this misfortune the more moving, we have just lost two agreeable guests, one of whom has taken away with him all that could make such captivity supportable—papa and the greyhounds. Judge if your letter was not welcomed, like the dove and the olive branch, by those who stayed behind!

Did not you see in the newspapers a strange, romantic, and almost incredible tale of an English lady, with a little daughter, a female friend, and a maid-servant, who were taken in a Swedish vessel bound from Lisbon to Bordeaux, by a Barbary corsair—carried to Algiers—neither suffered to land or to refit—turned adrift without provisions—becalmed for seven days on their way to Gibraltar—and finally put under quarantine at that place for six weeks, before they were permitted to proceed to their original destination? That lady was Mrs. Perry.* Think, my dear friend, what must have been her personal sufferings and her mental anguish; think of the mother's agony and the woman's fears; and admire with me the fortitude which enabled her already-debilitated constitution to struggle through such complicated evils! She survived them; but she will not, I fear, survive them long. Every account is worse and worse. A shower, a mist, a blast

* Wife of Mr. Perry of the 'Morning Chronicle,' and mother of Sir Erskine Perry.

of air, even the passage of a cloud over the sun, is to her a new disease; and soon, very soon, will this invaluable woman, in whom all the virtues are adorned by all the graces, be lost to those who love her as a wife, a mother, and a friend. What beauty, what talent, what goodness will die with her! The leading character of her mind and person was, indeed, a majestic purity, a dignified simplicity, a propriety almost intuitive, of which the polish was so intense that it almost repelled. I have never seen a woman who would have been so entirely feared had she not been entirely loved. But under that composed exterior, what sensibility, what wit, what warmth of heart disclosed itself to her friends! And of all those friends, who will lament her as I shall! for to whom—all kindness as she is—has she ever been so kind! My mother only could be dearer or more respected.

But I meant, my dear Sir William, to write you a gay letter, and behold I have suffered this melancholy subject to seize on my pen, and I shall presently make you as vapourish as myself.

To change the subject, I must give you an anecdote which impressed me much, connected with the late horrible affair of Sir Henry Mildmay and Lady Rosebery. My authority is a letter from Mr. Poulet Mildmay to a gentleman in Winchester. Sir Henry Mildmay, on his return from Scotland to his London house with the partner of his guilt, said to his housekeeper, "You know Lady Rosebery—she wishes you to continue with us—you must go directly to Winchester and get St. John's House ready for our reception." "Am I, sir," asked this firm and virtuous domestic—"am I to prepare for her ladyship the apartment in which her sister died?" It is scarcely necessary to add that the

guilty pair did not take Winchester in their road to the continent.

Did I, when talking of 'Waverley,' tell you that I had happened a year or two ago to meet with a most curious book—alluded to, though not named, in that work—entitled, 'Some Passages in the Life of Colonel Gardiner, by Dr. Doddridge?' This Colonel Gardiner is the Colonel G—— of 'Waverley,' and this biographical *morceau* is exactly calculated to form *le pendant* to the life of Johanna Southcote with which Mr. Toser will probably some day favour the world. The supernatural illumination is precisely the same in both cases, though I cannot find that the worthy colonel ever fancied himself in the family-way, or that he ever made any money of his conversion. Of course he was more fool and she is more knave—if knave can ever be feminine, which, alas! for the sex, I fear it can.

I am still firmly of opinion that Walter Scott had some share in 'Waverley;' and I know not the evidence that should induce me to believe that Dugald Stewart had anything to do with it. He! the triptologist!—as Horace Walpole says. He! the style-monger, whose periods, with their nice balancing and their elaborate finish, always remind me of a worthy personage in blue and silver, yclept, I believe, the Flemish Hercules, whom I have seen balancing a ladder on his finger, with three children on one end and two on the other—he write that half French, half English, half Scotch, half Gaelic, half Latin, half Italian—that hotch-potch of languages—that moveable Babel called 'Waverley!' My dear Sir William, there is not in the whole book one single page of pure and vernacular English; there is not one single period, of which you forget the sense in admiration of the sound.

The want of elegance is almost the only want in Miss Austen. I have not read her 'Mansfield Park;' but it is impossible not to feel in every line of 'Pride and Prejudice,' in every word of 'Elizabeth,' the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy. Wickham is equally bad. Oh! they were just fit for each other, and I cannot forgive that delightful Darcy for parting them. Darcy should have married Jane. He is of all the admirable characters the best designed and the best sustained. I quite agree with you in preferring Miss Austen to Miss Edgeworth. If the former had a little more taste, a little more perception of the graceful, as well as of the humorous, I know not indeed any one to whom I should not prefer her. There is none of the hardness, the cold selfishness, of Miss Edgeworth about her writings; she is in a much better humour with the world; she preaches no sermons; she wants nothing but the *beau-idéal* of the female character to be a perfect novel writer; and perhaps even that *beau-idéal* would only be missed by such a *petite maîtresse* in books as myself, who would never admit a muse into my library till she had been taught to dance by the Graces.

I am much obliged to you, my dear friend, for your kind condolence on the death of poor Marmion. I have appointed a successor to his post of pet greyhound in the shape of a beautiful black puppy called Moss Trooper, who is already as large as a good-sized donkey, and incomparably glossy and graceful. I am sadly afraid of losing him; I am so unfortunate in my favourites—but as he is only fifteen months old, has had the distemper, has a glorious appetite, and promises faithfully never to die as long as he lives, I have great.

hopes of him. He begs his compliments to Tray, *though unknown*, and I beg mine to Tray's fair mistress.

Ever, my dear sir,

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

P.S. What is become of the 'History of the Waltz' which I so much wish to see?

I have, since this was written, been reading both the false and the true letters on France and Ireland of Mr. Curran, which have made so much noise in the world; and, odd as it may seem, I think the letter which Mr. Curran so stoutly denies much more like his other writings, more distinguished by his peculiar style, than the one he avows! The former is full of wild fancy and bitter wit—clear, nervous, and (to say all in one word) completely Irish, both in its faults and beauties; the latter, with some tolerable passages, is in the main turgid, bombastic, full of an unintelligible *muddy depth*—of feelings terribly refined, and distinctions without a difference—in a word, completely German. Madame De Staël alone could rival him in the art of making nonsense look like sense. Did you ever meet Mr. Curran? His conversation is said to be unrivalled.

He was once staying in company with Godwin at the house of a friend of mine. Mr. Godwin, as usual, pretended to go to sleep after dinner. That it was only make-believe was, however, very visible; and Curran seized the opportunity to treat his worthy host with a character of Godwin the most bitter that his wit and his malice could invent, qualifying every phrase with "though he is my friend." The contortions of the philosopher, who dared not show he was awake during

this castigation, and the pretended fear which Curran showed of awakening him; the concealed anger of the one when he did venture to open his eyes, and the assumed innocence of the other; formed a scene which no comedy ever equalled. The advocate of sincerity, the frank philosopher Godwin, has, however, never forgiven this exemplification of his theory. God bless you! Adieu.

CHAPTER IX.

Letters for 1815.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, Feb. 13, 1815.

Are you, my dear friend, of the Wordsworth school? I think not; so I may venture to say that I do not much like that either. There is such a waste of talent —such imagination buried alive—in that vast wordy wilderness; such powers lavished upon a pedlar; such poetry thrown away on dull metaphysics—that antidote to poetry. Who is it says that "when one man is talking to another who does not understand him, and when he that is talking does not understand himself, that is metaphysics?"* I never did like dreams and visions and allegories, even in Addison and Spencer. *À propos* to painting, what is your *protégé* Mr. Haydon about? Are we to have *le pendant* to the 'Judgment of Solomon' in the next Exhibition? I hope Mr. Haydon will not desert the Old Testament. It appears to me that the great Italian painters have almost exhausted the New; and I even think that there is more

* Miss Mitford was never able to trace this definition beyond Mrs. Charles Kemble, whose description of metaphysics was, "When A talks to B and C, and B and C don't understand him, and A does not understand himself, that's metaphysics."

of variety, of splendour, of human feeling and passion in the Old, than in that pure and holy and godlike life, whose tears were tears of pity, and whose power was to save. You will not misunderstand me when I say that the ardent and erring David is a better hero for painting. God bless you, my dear friend! Pray write soon to

Your sincere and affectionate admirer,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, April 3, 1815.

Alas! my dear friend, you are mistaken—quite mistaken, I assure you. I am not going to be married. No such good luck, as papa says. I have not been courted, and I am not in love. So much for this question. If I ever should happen to be going to be married (elegant construction this!) I will then not fail to let you into the secret; but alas! alas! alas! "In such a *then* I write a never."

Pray have you read 'The Lord of the Isles?' I do not mean, as I once unwittingly did in the beginning of our correspondence, to draw you into the scrape of reading a poem; but, if you should by chance have looked at it, pray tell me how you like it. It is certainly a thousand times better than 'Rokeby,' and yet it does not please me as Scott's poems used to do. I am afraid that I once admired him a great deal too much; and now am in some danger of liking him a great deal too little. Nothing is so violent as a rebound, either of the head or the heart. Once extinguished, enthusiasm and all the fire in Vesuvius will never light it again. I fancy that the world is something of my mind in this respect, and begins to tire of its

idol. Only the world is not half so honest, and instead of knocking down one piece of wood, contents itself with sticking up another right before it. "It is not," say all the gentle damsels of my acquaintance, "that we like Scott less—we only like Lord Byron better." Now I do not—I like Scott less—but Lord Byron less still. The only *modern* poet whom I like better and better is Campbell.

I have told you that I would not put you in danger of being jingled into a fever by "mincing poesy;" but I have found out, to my great satisfaction, that I shan't affront you by recommending a prose epic to your perusal; and I have lately been very much and very unexpectedly pleased with Lady Morgan's (*ci-devant* Miss Owenson) 'O'Donnel.' I had a great prejudice and dislike to this fair authoress ever since I read a certain description of which she was guilty, where part of a lady's dress is described as "an apparent tissue of woven air," and really took up the book with an idea that nothing but nonsense could come from that quarter. I was, however, very much disappointed in my malicious expectations of laughing at her, and obliged to content myself with laughing with her. Her hero is very interesting—her heroine very amusing. There are some good characters, particularly a managing bustling woman of fashion; *et pour la bonne-bouche* there is an Irish servant not much, if at all, inferior to the admirable Irishmen of Miss Edgeworth.

A propos to novels, I have discovered that our great favourite, Miss Austen, is my countrywoman; that mamma knew all her family very intimately; and that she herself is an old maid (I beg her pardon—I mean a young lady) with whom mamma before her marriage was acquainted. Mamma says that she was then the

prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembers; and a friend of mine, who visits her now, says that she has stiffened into the most perpendicular, precise, taciturn piece of "single blessedness" that ever existed, and that, till 'Pride and Prejudice' showed what a precious gem was hidden in that unbending case, she was no more regarded in society than a poker or a fire-screen, or any other thin upright piece of wood or iron that fills its corner in peace and quietness. The case is very different now; she is still a poker—but a poker of whom every one is afraid. It must be confessed that this silent observation from such an observer is rather formidable. Most writers are good-humoured chatterers—neither very wise nor very witty:—but nine times out of ten (at least in the few that I have known) unaffected and pleasant, and quite removing by their conversation any awe that may have been excited by their works. But a wit, a delineator of character, who does not talk, is terrific indeed!

After all, I do not know that I can quite vouch for this account, though the friend from whom I received it is truth itself; but her family connections must render her disagreeable to Miss Austen, since she is the sister-in-law of a gentleman who is at law with Miss A.'s brother for the greater part of his fortune.* You must have remarked how much her stories hinge upon entailed estates; doubtless she has learnt to dislike entails. Her brother was adopted by a Mr. Knight, who left him his name and two much better legacies in an estate of five thousand a year in Kent, and another of nearly double the value in Hampshire; but it seems he forgot some ceremony—passing a fine, I think they call it—

* Every other account of Jane Austen, from whatever quarter, represents her as handsome, graceful, amiable, and shy.

with regard to the Hampshire property, which Mr. Baverstock has claimed in right of his mother, together with the mesne rents, and is likely to be successful. Before I quite drop the subject of novels, I must tell you that I am reading 'Guy Mannering' with great pleasure. I have not finished it nearly, so that I speak of it now as any one would do that had read no further than the second volume of the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' and that would be much better than one who had finished it. I do not think that Walter Scott did write 'Guy Mannering;' it is not nearly so like him as 'Waverley' was, and the motto is from 'The Lay.'

I am quite happy that you are of my opinion with regard to Scripture heroes; I always think myself so safe when you agree with me. It was, however, natural in Mr. Haydon to wish to draw the bow of Ulysses and try the subject which has engaged all the great masters. Mr. Eustace, I think it is, who has objected to the exaggerated expression of meekness which distinguishes the Christ of the Italian painters. In those which I have seen I should rather complain of the *entire absence* of the expression of power—power latent, dormant, in repose, but still power—still that power which could without exertion, with unaltered calmness, heal the sick and raise the dead. It would be less absurd to paint a sleeping Hercules without the appearance of strength, than to delineate our Saviour without the expression of power. No one can so well supply this defect as Mr. Haydon, and he is very likely to have done it.

Always most affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, May 13, 1815.

Oh, my dear Sir William, what a sad flatterer you are! I blushed from my eyes to my fingers' ends, neck, ears, and elbows included—blushed like—like—do help me to a simile—blushed like beetroot, on reading your dear, charming, fibbing letter. But I am sadly afraid that I smiled too, and that the flattery was a great deal more welcome than, as the wise are wont to say, flattery ever ought to be. . . .

With regard to novels, I should like to see one undertaken without any plot at all. I do not mean that it should have no story; but I should like some writer of luxuriant fancy to begin with a certain set of characters—one family, for instance—without any preconceived design further than one or two incidents and dialogues, which would naturally suggest fresh matter, and so proceed in this way, throwing in incidents and characters profusely, but avoiding all stage tricks and strong situations, till some death or marriage should afford a natural conclusion to the book. Is this quite impossible? I think not. Our grandmothers, when about to make a *beau pot*, proceeded, I fancy, much as their gardeners when clipping a yew hedge or laying out a parterre. Every stalk and stem was in its place; tulip answered tulip, and peony stared at peony. Even a rebellious leaf was reduced to order, and the huge bouquet spread its tremendous width as flat, as stiff, and almost as ugly as its fair framer's painted fan. We, their granddaughters, throw our honeysuckles and roses into their vases with little other care than to produce the grace of nature by its carelessness and profusion. And why should we not do so by the flowers of fancy?

The only thing that I cannot forgive in Mrs. Carter

is the most unaccountable contempt with which she talks of the 'Odyssey,' the sweetest specimen of Grecian genius, and a picture of ancient manners so perfect because so undesigned. Every one who reads the descriptions of Gothic costume in Walter Scott, and of Turkish habits in Lord Byron, must be convinced by their very elaborateness and detail that they tell of things new both to them and their readers—things of which they know but little. All their panoply of love or war, their Turkish boudoirs and their Gothic drinking-halls, cups, amulets, rosaries, mazers and all, are set down as part of the fiction; and we never find out that so it might have been, till some good old gentleman is kind enough to tell us so in a note. But every touch of costume, every minute stroke of manners in Homer, comes on us at once with the clearness, the freshness, and the loveliness of truth. I speak of this, perhaps, with the more enthusiasm because I have lately been reading Dr. Clarke's 'Travels in the Troas,' with an interest which would almost appear ridiculous in one who has only read Homer in her mother tongue; but I always worshipped his genius as second only to our own Shakespeare's, and always loved the 'Odyssey' best.

Among the thousand and one instances of kindness and indulgence that I owe to you, my own dear friend, I do not know any one which more deserves my thanks than your unheard-of forbearance in abstaining from crowing over me on the score of my poor friend, Lord Cochrane, who is certainly, to say the least of the matter, a little straitwaistcoat-ish. Do not, however, because I acknowledge him to be a little mad, understand me to admit that he is guilty; but mad he most undoubtedly must be—his escape and his return both prove it. He was always a man of reverie, of deep

musings, of concentrated imagination. The things that passed before his bodily eye made little impression on his mind. He lived rather to fancy and the future, than to the present and the real.

Affectionately yours,
M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Oakhampton House, Wiveliscombe.*

Bertram House, July 6, 1815.

Since I wrote to you last, my dear friend, I have been twice in London, seeing sights (as we country gentlewomen always do when we escape from our eternal trees, and fields, and hedges, and ditches), and getting tired to death in the pleasantest way in the world—on the high road of dissipation. Of all that I have seen, nothing has afforded me half so much delight as Miss O'Neil. She broke my heart, and charmed me beyond expression by showing me that I had a heart to break—a fact I always before rather doubted, having been, till I saw her, as impenetrable to tragedy as Punch and his wife or any other wooden-hearted biped. But she is irresistible. You must have had so many and so much better accounts of this exquisite actress, that I shall not attempt to say more than that the manner in which she identifies herself with the character exceeds all that I had before conceived possible of theatrical illusion. You never admire—you only weep. The way in which she gives herself up to the passion is quite unprecedented on the stage, and nothing to my imagination so clearly proves that she is a perfectly modest and decorous woman as the total self-abandonment with which she throws herself into Beverley's arms (Young's I mean—'twas in the 'Gamester' I saw her), winding around him, clinging to him,

and caressing him like the fondest and most innocent child. But her beauty has certainly been over-rated; I scarcely think her handsome. Good-evening to you, good sir! I am going to take a walk—a wade through the oceans of dust into which the world seems to be crumbling. *Au revoir.*

The next morning.

Since I wrote to you I have been to see Donnington Castle, the classic ground where Chaucer certainly resided and perhaps wrote some of those exquisite tales which, while they are among the earliest specimens of our language, will undoubtedly endure to the last. Are you an enthusiast for this venerable bard? My admiration for him is very ardent. His poetry seems to me so healthy, so vigorous, so much in the thought, and so little in the expression; his powers are so various, so pliable, ranging at will from the thrilling pathos of Griselda to the wild fancy of 'Cambuscan bold.' There is, too, such painting, such individuality in his personages, such freshness in his landscapes, that even those passages which have been echoed by every succeeding poet seem new again in him; and, above all, he lets us, undesignedly, so much and so entirely into the manners of that picturesque age—he shows us so completely behind the scenes on the great stage of chivalry—that, setting Milton and Shakespeare aside, I am not sure that I don't prefer him to almost any writer in the circle of English poetry. I speak, of course, of his best works and not of his poems *en masse;* but two or three of his 'Canterbury Tales,' and some select passages from his other productions, are worth all that the age of Queen Anne, our Augustan age as it has been called, ever produced. So thinking and so feeling, you may conceive what sensations the beautiful

ruin of Donnington, in a bright spring day, with its romantic hill literally garlanded with the may-bushes that grow in its trenches, produced on my imagination. I climbed to the top of the old tower to enjoy the prospect and mingle my name with that of other pilgrims on the walls; and nothing but the certainty that you must have seen it in your migrations from Bath to London saves you from the description of all the beauties that I saw and felt on that sweet morning; when everything that is lovely in Nature, and everything that is interesting in association, combined to lull my mind into that rare overflow of enjoyment which Chaucer so well describes when he says—

> "Hard is his heart who loveth nought
> In May, when all this mirth is wrought."

If ever I have happened to mention Chaucer to you before, I have most probably praised him in the self-same way; but mine is, I believe, the very worst memory that ever condescended to stand sentinel at the half-way house between twenty and thirty. . .

Ever most affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham.*

Bertram House, July 19, 1815.

As I was looking yesterday evening over a collection of your letters, I found from the contents of one of them that I had most unaccountably forgotten to send you a *fac-simile* of *Louis le Desiré's* letter to Lady C. Aynsley, for which forgetfulness I beg your pardon, my dear Sir William, a thousand times; and, as kings of France are come in fashion again, I hastened to repair my omission by copying, as well as I was able,

the aforesaid epistle.* The ink has run a little on the Chinese paper which I employed for the purpose, but his own note was very black, being written apparently with bad ink and a bad pen on most detestable paper—so that the general effect is perhaps more like it than if the writing had been perfectly clear and distinct. I heard a great deal respecting that very good, but weak and bigoted man from a French lady, Madame de Gourbillon, who was one of the favourite attendants of his late wife. His memory (what a royal endowment that memory is!) exceeds even that of our own venerable king. If you mention the slightest, the least remarkable fact in natural history, in the belles lettres, in history, in anything, he will say, "Ay, Buffon, or La Harpe, or Vertot speaks of it so-and-so" (quoting the very words) "in such a volume, such a chapter, such a page, and such a line." And he is always correct, even to a monosyllable! What a prodigious organ of memory, is it not? (I hope you are not a craniologist.) I know nothing to be compared with it except the knowledge of the Bible exhibited by a Methodist preacher in our neighbourhood, whose very fingers' ends appear to participate in this scriptural instinct, for he seems always to open the volume at the right place, without even directing his eyes towards it.

Another fact which I ascertained respecting the King of France is, that he is afraid of my friend, *la Lectrice de la feue Reine*, as ever child was of its schoolmistress; and really it is no impeachment to his courage, for I am not at all sure that Buonaparte himself could stand against her. She was one of the best-bred and most elegant women I ever saw in my life till she fell in a passion, and then—oh, my dear Sir William, I do wish

* This note is lost.

you could have seen her! Papa and she regularly quarrelled once a day on the old cause, "France *versus* England," varied occasionally into "French *versus* English;" for she very reasonably used to attack papa for his utter want of French, in which I believe he scarcely knows *oui* from *non;* and he, with no less reason, would retort on her want of English,—she having condescended to vegetate twelve years in this island of fogs and roast beef without being able at the end of that time to distinguish "How do you do?" from "Very well, I thank you."

These battles were irresistibly amusing, for though the son of one party and the daughter of the other commonly officiated as interpreters, it was very seldom that either combatant would wait for a translation; and, indeed, if they had waited, however the fluent organs of Monsieur le Comte might have enabled him to follow papa's harangues, I am quite sure that my English tongue could never have been able to do justice to the tirades of Madame la Comtesse. All attempts at understanding, however, both parties boldly defied; the one argued and the other scolded, *à tort et à travers,* like two artificers of the Tower of Babel; and nothing but pure weariness put an end to the fray. It commonly, indeed, finished by the gentleman's walking off and leaving the lady mistress of the field. *Monsieur son fils* was quite as amusing as his mother; he was in everything a Frenchman in caricature—twenty times as noisy, twenty times as active, twenty times as loyal, and twenty times as vain as any Frenchman I ever knew in my life. A poet, a hero, and a harlequin, he made love to every woman, and jumped over every chair in every room which he entered. I really never saw such a genius for pantomime. What a pity that it should be wasted on

a chief of La Vendée! These personages formed part of a society in which I spent the greater part of the last week that I passed in London. The *figurantes* of the scene, besides our good host and hostess, were chiefly young English women for my companions, and French abbés for Madame's—not the smart little abbés of whom Marmontel talks, so gay and so pleasant and so naughty; but a species of animal like nothing upon earth but a country-town old maid, or a village apothecary—the very essence and abstract of gossiping and lies.

This *lourde assemblée* was, however, often varied by more agreeable visitors; amongst the rest by General Mina, with whom I was very much pleased. You know, of course, his eventful history; that Buonaparte's treacherous invasion of Spain excited him, when still a boy of seventeen, to break from college at the Battle of Corunna, with such of his companions as he could persuade to accompany him; how great a share he and the guerillas had in subduing the French; and how prettily he was rewarded by that embroiderer of petticoats and patron of inquisitions, Fernando el Rey, from whose dominions he escaped almost by miracle, and is now a proscribed, and I fear neglected exile in England. He is a very insignificant-looking young man in his person, and his face is almost plain when silent, and almost handsome when speaking. This proceeds from the extraordinary animation and acuteness of his eyes and his smile. I have not misplaced the epithets; for the gaiety is entirely in his laughing black eyes, and the penetration almost wholly in his smile. His manner is very gentle and unaffected, and his conversation lively and interesting, in spite of the vilest Spanish-French ever uttered by tongue. This, however, was no great objection to me, who hate speaking

any language but my own (in which attempt I generally succeed, to use Chaucer's phrase, "like the jay when he chattereth English"), and am therefore proportionably comforted to find any one talking worse French than myself. After all, I believe the chief thing I liked about General Mina was his being one of the very few heroes whom my principles (or, if you will, my prejudices) will allow me to like at all.

Most affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 1, 1815.

I have just this morning received your despatch, and I am dying for another of your delightful letters, with more news of the Emperor. Goodness! if I were in your place I *would* see him! I would storm the 'Bellerophon'* rather than not get a sight of him, ay, and a talk with him too. You and I have agreed to differ respecting the Emperor, and so we do now in our thoughts and our reasonings, though not, I believe, much in our feelings; for your relenting is pretty much the same with my—(what shall I venture to call it?)—my partiality. We neither of us wish to see him on the throne again; but rather *that*, a thousand times, than to belong to the class who would have such a man hanged and quartered and condemned to all eter-

August 4.

-nity, I should have added, had I not been interrupted by two dear little friends (daughters of the late excellent Mrs. Webb) who took possession of me, mind

* On which Buonaparte was on board at Plymouth, on his way to St. Helena.

and body; and now that three days have broken the chain of association to pieces, I really cannot remember what I was going to say. I believe, however, that I intended to answer your questions respecting the disposal of the Emperor. I have not yet been able to make up my mind where to put him, though I rather think Stirling or Dumbarton should be his prison for the present; but I have quite determined that he should be treated "not according to his deserts," as Hamlet says, "or who would 'scape whipping? but according to our honour." I would so treat him as to deserve the noble praise that Plutarch gives to the Athenians, by showing ourselves "braver than our enemies, and more moderate than our allies."

But though I cannot tell you exactly what I would do with the great Napoleon, I can and will tell you what I would not do to him. I would not un-Emperor him—I would not separate him from any of his faithful followers—I would not ransack his baggage, as one would do by a thief suspected of carrying off stolen goods—I would not limit him to allowances of pocket-money to buy cakes and fruit like a great schoolboy—I would not send him to "a rock in the middle of the sea," like St. Helena—and, above all, my very dear friend, I should never dream of planting him to be scorched and frozen in that nether end of the world called Siberia. Where did you find out that that Russian Botany Bay was a desirable country to reside in? Was it from that luckless flatterer, Professor Pallas? Do you remember how dear one piece of imperial flattery—a very similar one, by-the-way—cost him? He had called the Crimea "the Garden of Eden, a terrestrial paradise, a heaven upon earth;" and this flourishing description being addressed in his 'Survey of the Empire' to that Russian

edition of Mary Queen of Scots without her beauty, the husband-killing Catharine, she, with a retributive justice quite refreshing in an empress, bestowed on him an immense estate in this blooming region, and ordered him to live on it. And there he was found by Dr. Clarke and Mr. Cripps, languishing in the solitude of a vast palace, the prey of fever, discontent, and *ennui*.

Ever, my dear Sir William,

Most affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 20, 1815.

What shall I talk to you about, my dear friend? Shall I tell you that our beaux are all in despair because we had no races this year, and most ungallantly revenged their cause on the unfortunate belles by not attending the ball, by courtesy called a Peace Ball, and leaving the aforesaid belles to dance by themselves, so that the despair was universal; extending, I verily believe, to every damsel in the neighbourhood except your poor little friend, who has no great love of races, and something very like an aversion to balls.

What, indeed, should I do at a dance with my dumpling of a person tumbling about like a cricket-ball on uneven ground, or a bowl rolling among nine-pins—casting off with the grace of a frisky Yorkshire cow, or going down the middle with the majesty of an overloaded hay-waggon passing through a narrow lane? What should I do at a ball? I have not been at one for these two years, and never, if I can avoid it, mean to go to one again. The present passion of the neighbourhood, indeed—of the male part of it, I mean—is not dancing but cricket. I have a great admiration

for this manly exercise, which really engrosses all the souls and bodies of all the men, high and low, within twenty miles of this place. My love of it arises, I suppose, from the influence of local attachment, as your countryman, Mr. Polwhele, would call it. Alresford is or will be celebrated in history for two things; the first —to speak modestly—is my birth; the second is cricket. Cricket is to Alresford what beer is to Dorchester, or cakes to Shrewsbury. Hampshire is the Greece of cricketers, and Alresford the Athens. Papa, too, has a great fondness for this truly English sport, and "though he plays no more, o'erlooks the *balls*."

Pray tell me if you are a cricketer. I have a great notion that you are, but my father says you have not in all your county level space enough for a cricket-ground: I have a prodigious idea that this is a fib. Gratify, I beseech you, my dutiful inclination by telling me that it is.

God bless you, my dear Sir William! Papa and mamma join in kindest regards and good wishes.

Ever most affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Sept. 18, 1815.

I was very much entertained with your admirable Quaker story; but I still can't help having a sneaking kindness for the sect; not perhaps for its religious tenets, but for its peaceableness, its industry, its simplicity, and its frankness. I do not dislike their singularity either. In our present high state of civilisation, people are so much alike, that anything at all odd comes on one with the freshness and character of an antique coin among smooth shillings. I must

confess, however, that I do not know many Quakers, which may be one reason of my partiality; since of the few I have met with, the men have been shrewd and honest, and the women have had minds as fair, as pure, and as delicate as their dove-eyed beauty or their spotless dress. This terrible anti-climax warns me to go to bed. It smells of drowsiness, does it not? It fairly nods, and I dare say you are nodding too. Good-night, good-night, and God bless you! and believe me ever, sleeping or waking,

Most affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

[*Enclosed in the foregoing letter.*]

SONNET,

ON VISITING DONNINGTON CASTLE, SAID TO HAVE BEEN THE LATEST RESIDENCE OF CHAUCER, AND CELEBRATED FOR ITS RESISTANCE TO THE ARMY OF THE PARLIAMENT DURING THE CIVIL WARS.

Oh for some sprite to lead the ivy band,
High-seated Donnington, around thy towers!
Oh for some sprite to wipe from Chaucer's bowers
The lingering trace of War's deforming hand!
Nature herself hath banished from the land
Such signal. Here the trench no longer lours,
But, like a bosky dell, bedecked with flowers
And garlanded with May, it seems to stand
A very spot for youthful poet's dreams
In Spring's fair hour: Griselda's mournful lay,
The "half-told"* tale would sound still sweeter here.
Oh for some sprite to hide with ivy spray
War's ravages, and chase the meaner themes
Of King and State, Roundhead and Cavalier!

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* "Or call up him that left half-told
The story of Cambuscan bold," &c.

MILTON—*Il Penseroso.*

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Dec. 24, 1815.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Mrs. Opie is not, to my sorrow, the only female who is a butterfly on Parnassus and a grub everywhere else. I have been teased by booksellers and managers, and infinitely more by papa, for a novel and a play; but, alas!—far worse off than the worthy citizen of Molière, who had spoken prose all his life without knowing it—I have been obliged to refuse because I can only write in rhyme. My prose—when I take pains, is stiffer than Kemble's acting, or an old maid's person, or Pope's letters, or a maypole—when I do not, it is the indescribable farrago which has at this moment the honour of saluting your eyes.

This is really very provoking, because I once—ages ago—wrote four or five chapters of a novel, which were tolerably lively and entertaining, and would have passed very well in the herd, had they not been so dreadfully deficient in polish and elegance. They had no more grace than a dancing bear; so I threw them into the fire forthwith, and have never since adventured out of the leading-strings of metre. Now it so happens that of all other qualities this unattainable one of elegance is that which I most admire and would rather possess than any other in the whole catalogue of literary merits. I would give a whole pound of fancy (and fancy weighs light), for one ounce of polish (and polish weighs heavy). To be tall, pale, thin, to have dark eyes and write gracefully in prose is my ambition; and when I am tall, and pale, and thin, and have dark eyes, then, and not till then, will my prose be graceful.

We will now talk of something better worth the flow

of ink; of Dryden and of Pope. I have, since writing to you, been reading all the readable books of these great poets—Dryden in Walter Scott's edition of eighteen volumes, and Pope in ten huge volumes edited by your friend Mr. Bowles, with notes by Warburton, by Warton, by Walpole, by Ruffhead, by Johnson, by Steevens, by Malone—in short, by everybody; at the rate of two lines of Pope to twenty of prosing. I am not a little delighted with both authors, and a great deal disgusted with their editors. Walter Scott, beside being in his life of Dryden and elsewhere as "dull as the fat weed that grows on Lethe's bank" (he never could write 'Guy Mannering' I am sure—it is morally impossible!), is the most egregious, unblushing flatterer that ever poured his slimy incense in a monarch's ear. He praises all kings, except King William; all dukes, except the Duke of Monmouth; and all lords, except Lord Russell. I wonder for my part that the man, being a Scotchman and of course an economist, should be so lavish of so valuable an article as to waste so much good and profitable flattery on the dead—though, to do him justice, he is equally profuse to the living.

"Peace to all such!" Dryden, though in this point almost equally guilty, has a thousand excuses—in party, in poverty, in the usage of the times, and, above all, in that redeeming genius and that private amiability which would make one forgive almost anything to the author of 'Don Sebastian,' of the 'Music Ode,' of 'Palamon and Arcite,' of 'Absalom and Ahitophel,' and, above all, of those incomparable prefaces which appear to me equally models of style and of criticism.

I do not think quite so well of his waspish successor, to say nothing of those detestable letters which affect to be unaffected and work so hard to seem quite at

their ease. Pope is, even in poetry, of a lower flight and a weaker grasp than his predecessor. In short, he is, in the fullest sense of the word, a mannerist. When you have said 'The Dunciad,' the 'Eloise,' and 'The Rape of the Lock,' you can say nothing more but 'The Rape of the Lock,' 'The Dunciad,' and the 'Eloise.' I have some notion that you are of a different opinion, and I am very glad of it; I love to make you quarrel with me. Nothing is so tiresome as acquiescence; I would at any time give a dozen civil Yes's for one spirited No—especially in correspondence, which is exactly like a game of shuttlecock, and would be at an end in an instant if both battledores struck the same way. Perhaps, however, I am a little prejudiced against Pope from his unpleasant character. He is always vaunting his own virtues; and it does not, to be sure, appear that he ever committed any hangable or transportable offence; but, if the criterion of virtue be to diffuse the greatest possible share of happiness, and that of vice to occasion the largest portion of pain, I question whether all the sheep-stealers and coiners who have been candidates for Tyburn ever caused so many unpleasant sensations to their fellow-creatures.

Are you awake after this drowsy critique? A little yawning I see—*mais cela passera;* you will only require one pinch from the dear snuff-box to open your eyes as wide as usual and regain your wonted brilliancy. I have not quite done yet, though. I must tell you that I have been reading Mason's Life and edition of Gray, with the most unmingled admiration of both authors. What poems, what letters, what biography! Oh, for more Masons and more Grays! Well, and I have been much pleased with the 'Queen's Wake,' and 'The Pilgrims of the Sun,' particularly the first,

written by that man of the horrid name, the Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg. I am not going to recommend them to you, because I know you to be a poetical epicure; you like nothing but ortolans and pineapples. Seriously, they are not poems to recommend to any one who has not a good digestion for ghosts, angels, fairies, and "such small deer"—for they are real fairy tales in verse, but highly imaginative, often beautiful, and occasionally sublime. 'Kilmeny' is exquisite—it lifts one above the clouds; and it is really painful to descend from so sweet a vision into this work-a-day world. I wished to live there for ever. My critical arrows are all spent.

Believe me to be, with the sincerest good wishes to you and your family, ever,

Your obliged and affectionate friend,

M. R. M.

CHAPTER X.

Letters for 1816.

To Sir William Elford, *Wiveliscombe, Somersetshire.*

Bertram House, Tuesday,
Jan. 13, 1816.

My dear Sir William,

I told you that my flounce, or rather myself, was likely to be a bridesmaid very speedily. Now this very speedily was a little mistake of mine, and dictated rather by my hope than my thought. When the happy event will take place, Heaven only knows! but I am quite sure that no one, not even the bridegroom elect, wishes it half so much as I. I have the honour, you must know, to be "the confidante in white dimity" on this occasion, and have really had no comfort for the last six weeks from the doubts, and fears, and misgivings of my 'Tiburina.' All that time has she taken to consider of a proposal, of which she knew six months before, from a man whom she has known six years. Every quarter of an hour she consults her father, sisters, aunts, cousins, and friends, as to her answer. But she is in a sad dilemma, poor thing! for, though advice be in general "as plenty as blackberries," none can she get for love or money. Nobody will advise her. All her acquaintance are discreet—all her relations indulgent. She is more to

be pitied than any one I know, for do what she may, she will have no one to blame but herself. In the mean time, if she do not soon say Yes or No, she will be spared the trouble, for she will certainly die of the oscillation. The human mind is not made like a pendulum, to swing backwards and forwards ten times in a minute. She will wear herself out in another fortnight if she does not make up her mind—and how it would sound, "Died of a proposal of marriage!" It would be almost as bad as a poor man at Reading the other day, who is really dead from joy at receiving the *hundredth* part of a sixteenth of a fifty thousand pounds prize in the lottery.

After all, my friend will undoubtedly put my flounce in requisition, for *le futur* is just the sort of man whom women marry; and are happy with—sometimes; good-looking, good-natured, rich, and young—not burthened with much wit or much wisdom—and the least in the world of a *petit máitre*. Now this is just the sort of man women marry; the sort of man they fall in love with is very different. He is a neighbour too, and I agree with Miss Edgeworth in thinking juxtaposition sovereign in match-making, though I do not agree with her in thinking it of any effect in love—except, indeed, with those very sighing damsels who cannot keep their hearts while they walk up street, and so are forced to leave them with their next-door neighbours. But it is my *theory* (I beg you to observe, my dear friend, that theory and practice are two very different things)—it is my theory, then, that love never flourishes so luxuriantly as when distance and difference, of fortune or of station, give full scope to the imagination. A castle or a cottage; a prince or a peasant; a Swede or an Italian; may all give full

play to the poetry of the heart; but to fall in love with a stupid man who lives in the next town, in a brick house, with a walled garden—whose father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, aunts and brothers you have been tired of all your life—to fall in love with such a man as that is really more than impossible.

From marriages to scandal is the most natural transition imaginable. Only think of Braham having at last run away from Storace and her wig. I am very sorry for it, since it may deprive us of Braham's sweet notes. I hope you like Braham's singing, though I know among your scientific musicians it is a crime *de læze majesté* to say so; but he is the only singer I ever heard in my life who ever conveyed to my very unmusical ears any idea of the expression of which music is susceptible; no one else joins any sense to the sound. They may talk of music as "married to immortal verse;" but if it were not for Braham they would have been divorced long ago. All the rest might just as well sing backwards, as the Chinese write, or indeed sing in Chinese or Otaheitan, for any benefit they derive from the poetry. Moore's singing has, indeed, great feeling; but then his singing is not much beyond a modulated sigh—though the most powerful sigh in the world. I must comfort myself for the loss of Braham by the acquisition of Fantoccini.

My passion for Punch has always been almost as great as Lord Plymouth's, of Punch-buying memory; indeed, if ever I had been mistress of twenty pounds I might perhaps have bought him myself. I am therefore quite delighted with the prospect of a multiplied Punch which lasts three hours. Heaven knows when this happy prospect will be realised, for I am not in London yet, nor do I know when I shall be there.

Well, my dear Sir William, I must finish now, for I have nothing more to tell you, except that I have just taken a new pet; the most sagacious donkey that ever lived. She lets nobody ride her—follows me everywhere, even in doors when she can—and is really a wonderful animal. Her favourite caress is to have her ears stroked. Shakespeare has noticed this in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' where Titania tells Bottom that she will give him musk-roses (my donkey eats roses too) and "stroke thy fair large ears, my gentle joy." I think I shall send this instance as a new illustration of Shakespeare's *savoir* in asses' manners. This Shakespeare really did know by intuition or otherwise more than it seems possible for him to have learnt in an antediluvian life; he not only tells thoughts, and words, and feelings—he foretells them. I wonder that James the First, who believed *tout de bon* in conjuration and witchcraft, and such branches of learning, never burnt him for a wizard.

My black seal is for a very venerable relation, my father's uncle, who died lately in his ninety-fourth year. He had lost his mental faculties for some years, but in person he was papa himself, with hair still more beautiful—all silver; and eyes still brighter—all fire. It was the loveliest old age that imagination could picture; far more lovely than the most brilliant youth. God bless you, my dear friend!

Always most affectionately yours,

M. R. M.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *sent to London in an enclosure forwarded by* DR. MITFORD.

Bertram House, April 28, 1816.

Are not Lord Byron's leave-taking verses beautiful? I believe I indulged myself with abusing him to you, but ever since those verses I have felt certain relentings towards the luckless author. Partly I believe this effect may be owing to some particles of contrariness in my disposition, which have been a good deal excited by the delicate morality of his admirers in this neighbourhood, who excuse themselves to themselves for their *ci-devant* admiration by a double portion of rancour towards his lordship and pity towards his wife. "Poor Lady Byron!" "Unfortunate victim!" "Hapless sufferer!" and so forth, are her style and titles at present. Now without at all attempting to vindicate him or accuse her, I cannot help thinking this immense quantity of sympathy rather more than the case requires. Why did she marry him? for, to do the man justice, he was no hypocrite; his vices were public enough. Why did she marry him but to partake his celebrity and bask in the sunshine of his fame? And by what device of conjugal flattery could that object have been attained so fully as at present? She has now the comfort of being "interesting" in the eyes of all men, and "exemplary" in the mouths of all women; she has, moreover—and even I, spinster as I am, can feel that *this* must be solid consolation—she has, moreover, the delight of hating her husband, to the admiration and edification of the whole world.

Nothing can be so beautiful as the country is at present. The cessation of the long east winds had something the same effect as the melting of snow in the northern regions; all the flowers burst forth at once.

The copses are carpeted with primroses, pansies, and wild-strawberry blossoms—the woods spangled with the delicate flowers of the wood-sorrel and the wood-anemone—and the meadows enamelled with cowslips. I have scarcely a flower to expect, except the brilliant field-tulip, hanging its head in the sun like a pendent ruby; and even this will be out in a day or two. The nightingales, too, are more abundant than usual (can't you come and hear them?), and as to the cuckoos—the detestable cuckoos—they swarm. God bless you, my dear friend!

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, July 2, 1816.

So you will not let me admire Madame Lavalette.* This is very cruel! What would you say if I should tell you I was in love with Mr. Bruce? Do you reckon nothing upon moral courage as contradistinguished from physical? Is there no fear but the fear of death? Is not the fortitude, the self-command, the holy deceit of this "French Alcestis" worth all the courage of a fighting Joan of Arc? I cannot give her up, my dear Sir William, and I verily believe you do not mean me to give her up; you only jerk the reins a little to make me prance and curvet and show blood.

* In a previous letter she had written: "As to admiration, all my admiring faculties are at present engaged—engrossed, I may say—in the service of Madame Lavalette. Admirable as her courage was in saving her husband, I like her best in the timidity and embarrassment she displayed at the trial. It was so feminine, so lovely, so English! Any other Frenchwoman in the world would have made a scene of it; and talked of feeling and sensibility, and so forth; as they always do, to whom feeling and sensibility are known only by name."

I prefer the French pulpit oratory to any other part of their literature. In every other branch we surpass them, but I do not think we can do more than equal the eloquence of their preachers; I mean, of course, their old preachers, Fénélon, Bourdaloue, Massillon, and Bossuet—especially the last, who approaches as nearly to the unrivalled sublimity of the sacred writings as any writer I have ever met with. Oh! what a contrast between him and our dramatic sermonists, Mesdames Hawkins and Brompton! I am convinced that people read them for the story, to enjoy the stimulus of a novel without the name, just as some valetudinarians swallow drams from the apothecaries under the name of stomachics. Ah! they had better take South and Blair and Secker for guides, and go for amusement to Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen. By-the-way, how delightful is her 'Emma!' the best, I think, of all her charming works.

I am just now delighting myself with reading and re-reading Bacon. Of course you have had this happiness ages ago, but to me it is a new pleasure; and, unless I could forget Shakespeare and contrive to make him an unknown thing, I cannot expect to enjoy such another. As a naturalist he was, of course, often wrong, though I suppose few have been so often original and right; but as a moralist he seems to me to have anticipated every one. Addison is only Bacon much diluted; Johnson is only Bacon mounted on stilts; but neither have preserved the delightful raciness, the spirit of compression which packs ideas so closely, the liveliness of illustration which brings everything before our eyes, or the curious felicity of style which in itself is almost painting, and which are but half the merits of Lord Bacon. Of his character I am afraid we must not talk. I could

forgive his sycophancy to King James, or shut my eyes to the permitted bribery of his servants; but his ingratitude to Lord Essex I cannot pardon even in the "wisest, greatest of mankind." Do you not lament the state of Mr. Sheridan? He and Mrs. Jordan, the soul and body of comedy, both vanishing together!

Adieu, my dear sir. Papa and mamma join in best remembrances, and I am always,

Your very affectionate friend,

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 1, 1816.

I was going, my dear friend, to give you a little *historiette* of one of my correspondents, the damsel of whose crossed and re-crossed epistles you have heard me speak with very proper apprehension. Till I knew her I had no idea of the existence of such an animal. I classed them with the syrens and krakens and other monsters of fiction, and should as soon have expected to see a real mermaid as a live heroine; but she is one to all intents and purposes. She is claiming a great estate from a barbarous guardian. She has blue eyes and flaxen hair. She is always in love, and, moreover, she has changed her name from Sarah to Almira without any one's consent but her own. Are not these the true signs of her profession? She has been unusually silent lately, and I began to be alarmed at the consequences of such a suppression of ink, and looked in every paper for her death or her marriage—till at last I received an epistle from a mutual friend written (*dans une grande crise d'émotion* your heroine never writes herself)—written at the fair Almira's request, to inform me of her future nuptials, and her misery occasioned by the death

of her old lover Colonel C—— just at the moment that she was about to marry her new lover Mr. B——, of whom I had never before heard. What the loss would have been at any other time she left to my imagination to picture; but really it could not be much worse, for she kept her bed for a fortnight—put off her wedding half a year—and I would wager my dear dog Moss Trooper against Jane Webb's ugly French pug that she wears weeds. She certainly writes (for she has just now answered a condoling-congratulatory note of mine, all black and white, like the squares of a chess-board)—she certainly writes upon widow's paper with black borders half an inch wide. In this very letter she tells me, I having advised her to shorten a little the time of poor Mr. B——'s probation, that "she does not know what other girls might do, but she cannot think of marrying a young man whom she adores just as she has lost one who was dearer to her than her existence!" Romance can, I think, go no farther, and so farewell my pretty Almira. But we have old heroines hereabouts as well as young ones. There really is such a species. Almira is no *lusus naturæ*. A most respectable *gouvernante* at Guildford has just brought out a new-old love-match of twenty-one years' standing. Only think of a secret's coming of age! Indeed, it might have died undiscovered had not the bridegroom, a still more respectable banker, happened to die first, and on his death-bed his bride claimed him.

How are you off for weather and hay? This very third day of August has the farmer, to whom we sold our grass, begun mowing for the first time! I never saw so strong an illustration of Rochefoucault's cried-down maxim as in his delight at the spoilt hay of his neighbours; but there was the double triumph of

avarice and skill to excuse him. Certainly such a summer is enough to make one wish for winter all the year round. Adieu, my own dear and kind friend.

Ever most sincerely and affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, August 31, 1816.

100,000,000 thanks for your kind and charming frankful, my dear Sir William! You are almost the only correspondent in the world who could afford to raise expectation (female expectation too!) so high by delay and then be so sure of satisfying it to the utmost.

I have been solacing myself for this week past, "taking mine ease" in a haycock left solely for my accommodation, where Mossy and I repair every morning to perform between us the operation of reading a *good book*, I turning the leaves and *he* going to sleep over it. It is (or rather it was, for the rain this morning must have demolished it) the most delightful haycock in the world; in a snug little nook; nothing visible but lawn and plantation; under an oak tree whose green leaves seemed cutting into the deep-blue heavens; and breathing the odours of the firs, whose fragrance this wet summer has been past anything I could have conceived in this country. It was certainly the most delightful haycock in the world, and a very healthy one too; I only caught one cold in it, and Mossy caught none.

How have you been able to amuse yourself this sad weather, my dear friend? We have had a grand cricket match between this parish and the next. Next neighbours, you know, are always boasters, rivals, and enemies; and we of Shenfield and Swallowfield have as

much malice as any two parishes in the kingdom. Well, papa was generalissimo of the Shenfieldians, and a certain unfortunate Mr. Bailey held the same post in the Swallowfield corps. Our Lucy came to me the day before this great event, with a face a French yard long—a common English yard is nothing to it—her face was a full ell. "Oh dear, Miss Mitford," quoth she, "we must lose. Do you know that Mr. Bailey has made his men drunk three times, and got tipsy twice with them himself. Now you know, ma'am, master has not made his men drunk once, nor yet got a-near tipsy himself; so we shall be sure to lose—we can't win." Nevertheless we did win—beat Swallowfield by twenty-seven notches; and Mr. Bailey and Mr. Bailey's men were obliged to get tipsy and drunk (to use Lucy's distinction) over again to console themselves for their misfortune.

By-the-way, I had the other day a very curious account of a tipsy party at the High Sheriff's, a dinner to the clergy and magistrates, from one of the latter, not papa—he was, alas! more than "a-near tipsy," though it is what scarcely ever happens to him—but from one who, being in ill-health, and under Dr. Baillie's care, was perforce obliged to act audience and keep sober. He had never before seen, with water-drinking eyes, that process of which ladies can only know the result, and gave a delightful account of the progress from talking to singing, from singing to shouting, from spilling wine in the dining-room to spilling coffee in the saloon. The Church, alas the day! was even more tottering than the Bench. A worthy archdeacon, on "The Clergy" being drunk, rose and "was much, much, much ob-obliged for the *health* they had done them, and begged to drink all their

honours." And the archdeacon was not an Irishman. My informant says he must take wine next time in self-defence.

Pray, my dear friend, were you ever a bridesmaid? I rather expect you to say no, and I give you joy of your happy ignorance, for I am just now in the very agonies of the office, helping to buy and admire wedding clothes; and I do assure you that it is the most tiresome occupation that ever was devised for mortal woman. To be married myself would not be half the trouble. The bride elect is a fair neighbour of mine, who was, in silk and muslin, as delightful a madcap as ever rode home in the last hay-waggon; but ever since she has taken to gauze and satin she is as dull as a duchess. Her head is a perfect milliner's shop. She plans out her wardrobe much as Phidias might have planned the Parthenon—has never laughed since her pearls came home,—never smiled since she tried on her tissue gown,—and has had no sleep since the grand question of a lace bonnet with a plume, or a lace veil without one, for the grand occasion, came into discussion. She is to be married in about a fortnight, unless she first kills herself with anxiety for her wardrobe; and I am sure that if she is not married in that time I shall die of fatigue in listening to it. She talks of nothing else; and I must talk of nothing else, or be silent. Dismal alternative! Peace be with her and speedy wedding—I am sure it will be a day of release for me. And she would be a charming woman, too, if there were no laces or plumes or bonnets or satins to be had in England, or milliners in London to make them up. God bless you, my dear friend!

Ever yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

P.S. *Sunday evening.*—The enclosed verses are so bad that I am almost ashamed to send them; but I should be still more ashamed of refusing any request of yours; so here they are. The reason of their being worse than ordinary is that I have quite left off rhyming; and so lost the habit and the facility which only habit can give.

[*Verses enclosed in the above letter.*]

TO TRAY—STOLEN.

Ah! whither art thou gone, poor Tray?
Ah! whither art thou gone?
And dost thou tread on English land,
Or dost thou on a foreign strand
Pour forth thy dismal moan?

Ah! what avails thy beauty, Tray!
Ah! what avails thee there?
Thy coat with richest red bedight,
Commingling with the purest white,
Thy wiry length of hair!

Ah! what avails thy beauty, Tray!
Ah! what avails thee now?
The spotted nose, the feathered feet,
The ears beneath the chin that meet,
The frown that decks thy brow!

Ah! fatal were thy beauties, Tray
"Fatally fair" thy face!
Now stranger hands that nose shall pat,
And unaccustomed voices chat
Of each peculiar grace.

Oh! be thou faithful still, poor Tray!
And sulk as thou wert wont;
Ere he whom, in a generous fit,
Nature made poet, painter, wit,
First led thee forth to hunt.

Oh! tease thy thievish owner, Tray!
Oh! tease the plunderer well!
Noisy or mute mistime thy notes,
Soil stockings, garters, petticoats,
Revolt, resist, rebel!

Revolt, resist, rebel, good Tray!
And tease his soul amain!
So shall he own the high behest,
That honesty still prospers best,
And send thee home again.

Sept. 1, 1816. **M. R. M.**

To Sir William Elford, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Oct. 20, 1816.

It has always been to me a very sufficient reason for not liking 'Hamlet,' that it is the chosen and favourite play of all those German metaphysicians, Schlegel, Goethe, Madame De Stäel, and Co.—persons who, while they are thoroughly incapable of appreciating the greater and more obvious beauties of our immortal poet, make him contribute to their own little vanity, by seizing hold of some equivocal passage, crying it up as a gem of their own finding, and talking "about it, goddess, and about it." My favourite play ("tell it not in Gath!") is the first part of 'King Henry the Fourth.' All the whining, crying, canting heroes that ever lived have less hold upon my affections—less power of interesting me—of carrying me off my legs (as a lady said of Burns), than that most delightful and most natural creature, the 'Gunpowder Percy,' the 'Hotspur of the North.' I am always a rebel when I see that play, and could never be reconciled to the catastrophe, were not Falstaff on the other side. Pray do you believe that Falstaff was a coward, a liar, a flatterer, and a glutton? Are you

not sure that all this is calumny, and that the humorous knight was a most valiant and gentlemanly, as well as a most delightful person? I am quite convinced of it, and cannot forgive Henry the Fifth for his shabby treatment of him after his father's death.

Next to this I like 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Macbeth,' 'The Tempest,' 'The Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'Richard the Third,' 'As You Like It,' and last, not least, 'Much Ado About Nothing.' The Beatrice of this last play is indeed my standard of female wit and almost of female character; nothing so lively, so clever, so unaffected, and so warmhearted, ever trode this work-a-day world. Benedick is not quite equal to her; but this in female eyes is no great sin. Shakespeare saw through nature, and knew which sex to make the cleverest. There's a challenge for you! Will you take up the glove?

You will find from this poetical confession of faith that I have a strong preference to comedy, and the fact, ignoble as it is, must be avowed. I even go so far as to think his comedies, and those parts of his tragedies which resemble comedy, the great and unrivalled distinction of Shakespeare. Many of his immediate successors approach him very nearly in tragic powers; Massinger equals him in declamation; Ford in sublimity; Fletcher in pathos: but no one comes near him in wit. Ben Jonson's best play is at a thousand leagues' distance.

I have at last safely disposed of my bride, to my infinite comfort and relief. Very grand wedding! Plenty of barouches and bridesmaids, cake and favours, kissing and crying! The bride, indeed, had amused herself with the last-mentioned recreation for a whole week, and having, moreover, accumulated on her person

so much finery in the shape of lace flounces, spensers, bonnets, veils, and scarfs that she looked as if by mistake she had put on two wedding-dresses instead of one, was by many degrees the greatest fright I ever saw in my life. Indeed, between crying and blushing, brides, and bridesmaids too, do generally look strange figures: I am sure we did—though, to confess the truth, I really could not cry, much as I wished to keep all my neighbours in countenance, and was forced to hold my handkerchief to my eyes and sigh in vain for "*ce don de dames que Dieu ne m'a pas donné.*" I don't really think if I were married myself I should have the grace to shed a tear. For the rest, all went off extremely well, except two small accidents, one of which discomposed me very much. One of my fellow-bridesmaids put on her skirt wrong-side outwards, and though half a dozen abigails offered to *transplant* the lace and bows from one side to the other, and though I all but went down on my knees to beg her not to turn it, turn it she would, and turn it she did—the obstinate! The other mischance was our entirely forgetting to draw any cake through the ring, so that our fate still rests in abeyance.

The bride and her second sister set off to Brighton, and I and the youngest remained to do the honours of the wedding-dinner. Of course we all got tipsy—those who were used to it comfortably enough, and those who were not, rather awkwardly—some were top-heavy and wanted tying up like overblown carnations, some reeled, some staggered—and one fell, and catching at a harp for a prop, came down with his supporter and a salver of coffee which he knocked out of the servant's hands; such a crash, vocal and instrumental, I never heard in my life!

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Nov. 24, 1816.

I was greatly shocked last week, my dear Sir William, by the sudden death of a most kind and worthy friend, Mr. Newell, of Whitby Park, near Reading. He made a coursing party for me on Thursday, and on Sunday he was in his coffin. Active, cheerful, hospitable, intelligent, he was one of the most respectable of that respectable class, the great English farmer. I never, indeed, knew any one so thoroughly English, in person, manner, and mind. Firm, stout, and upright as one of his own oaks, he had a countenance combining a great deal of weatherbeaten middle-aged beauty with a look of irresistible kindness, frankness, and good-humour—a voice that might have hailed a ship at sea without the assistance of a speaking-trumpet—and a heart that trusted to that voice every movement of its honest and generous feelings. He is a man who must be lamented by all who knew him; and his particular attention and constant kindness to me add to my loss and my regret. But every one dies who is kind to me. Take care of yourself, my dear Sir William. *En attendant,* God bless you!

Most sincerely and affectionately yours,
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

To SIR WILLIAM ELFORD, *Bickham, Plymouth.*

Bertram House, Dec. 23, 1816.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am very glad that we agree so well respecting the 'Antiquary' and Meg Merrilies. She certainly is a very melodramatic personage; and the admiration she excites is a proof of the same vitiated taste which leads to the preference of pieces of mere spectacle to the

legitimate drama. Besides her pretensions to prophecy, Colonel Mannering is, as you observe, correct in his "nativities." Do you know that this book has brought astrology into some degree of repute again? An instance of this has actually occurred in my own knowledge. A young Oxfordshire lady, of a character exactly resembling Miss Austen's 'Harriet Smith,' with the same prettiness, the same good-humour, the same simplicity, and the same knack of falling into love, and out of love, and into love again, had a scheme of life erected about two months ago. The conjuror took care to tell her several things which had happened in her family, and were well known to all the neighbourhood —many things, too, he told her of lovers and offers —much of husbands and children; but as the last and most solemn warning he told her to beware of fire in her thirtieth year. She heard it with horror, —a horror that shocked and alarmed the whole family. It was some time before she could be prevailed upon to reveal the cause, and when discovered she took to her bed for a fortnight. Ought not this man to be punished?

I am just now reading a very different book, one of which I had before read an abridgment, and indeed some part of the original, but not the whole—Bruce's 'Travels in Abyssinia.' Did you ever read them? No words can express the pleasure they have given me. I was never, I think, so carried away by a man in my life. Such courage, such fortitude, such power of mind and body;—there is the grand charm after all—it is the *command* of genius that carries a woman off her feet! The singular mixture of romantic adventure and historical truth—the strange fate of the book, too, cried down for so many years as a series of falsehoods,

and then proved by Dr. Clark, and Mr. Salt, and half a dozen other travellers to be true, even in its most improbable details! For my part, I cannot conceive how the accusation of falsehood, though it might affect its credit, could diminish its sale (it once, they say, might be bought as waste paper), since to me it would as a work of genius have been equally delightful, and perhaps still more wonderful as an invention than as a reality.

Nobody finds fault with Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe,' or that more extraordinary deception of his, the 'Journal of the Great Plague of London,' because they are works of imagination; and I do not understand why Mr. Bruce's adventures might not have been allowed the same license. I can, however, quite understand the delightful haughtiness which induced him to refuse answering any questions, and to tell his questioners to go and see. I quite understand that part of his character. It is just as Milton would have said; just as Burns. Oh, he was a hero of the right stamp! and I am really quite sorry that everybody should believe and admire him now; that I might not have the pleasure of believing and admiring him all to myself. In the mean time I do my best to do him honour. I have had a present of bantams, who are great pets and great beauties, and I have christened them all after Mr. Bruce's Abyssinian friends. My cock, an astonishingly lovely golden creature, is the old Ras Michael—his favourite wife is Ozoro Esther, and the other lady is Tecla Mariam. I must confess that I have not yet quite vanquished the difficulties of this nomenclature. My pets themselves do not (except when I have the barley measure in my hand) answer to it so readily as to Biddy, Biddy!

Are you not astonished at Dr. Parr's marriage?

though I am not sure if it has taken place yet. But he has actually found a lady of fifty, with a good fortune, willing to take him "for better, for worse," and is to be joined to her forthwith. Do you happen to know this *savant*, with his wig and his pipe? I do not know that I was ever so much disappointed in any one. I expected a Dr. Johnson—large, and tall, and loud, and stately—and then to see a little strange figure, and hear such a lisping, mumbling voice! It was falling from Alexander the Great to Tom Thumb the Little.

Adieu, my dear friend. Papa and mamma join in kindest remembrance. And I am ever

Most affectionately yours,

M. R. MITFORD.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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